

Bromfkidor



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BROMFKIDOR

A tale of the twentieth century
in two parts

by
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Book 1

THE LAND BENEATH THE WORLD

Some notes on pronunciation

The first outsider in the Republic of Bromfkidor was the explorer Claes Arnesen of Denmark. It was he who created the basics of the standard transliteration of the dominant Bromfkidoran tongue. This system is not always logical and, due to the ethnic background of its creator, has a somewhat Scandinavian flavor.

There are a differences in the values of a few of the letters. The letter J represents the sound of a consonant Y, while the more familiar J sound is represented by DZH.

The letter R is always rolled as in Spanish or Italian. The consonant blend SZ is pronounced like the S in the English word "pleasure" as is the combination ZH. This is done because in the Bromfkidoran national language there are two different letters representing this sound originating in separate root languages, much like the letters, S, K, and C in English. CZ is pronounced like the English CH, as is the letter C when it appears by itself. This is also because it represents two separate letters. The letter I is always short in the initial or medial position and always long (EE not EYE) in the terminal position. The letter O is always short in the initial or medial position (AW), and long in the terminal (OH). The letter E is always short (EH).

Adhering to these basic principals will result in a fairly accurate rendition of Bromfkidoran words and proper names.

Introduction

Cambridge, Massachusetts, U.S.A. December 3rd 1976

The icy wind of early winter crawled over the Harvard yard wall to lay a chilly hand on my cheek. Work had left me only half drained as opposed to the usual clobbering I tended to feel at this point in the week. I still had last year's gloves, holes and all, and today I felt each and every hole in perfect definition.

Trudging down Mount Auburn street through the light snow, I pushed myself to move faster, making my way for home and warmth. As I walked I pondered the problem of dinner. Down toward the corner of DeWolf I marched, past Tommy's Lunch, Sage Jr.'s, Czelzed Bromfkidor....genuine Antarctic cuisine. It just so happened to be payday and here was food. I went in.

The dinner special was *Farnoud Douy* with a soured *Falad* for only seven dollars, how could I go wrong? The waiter was tall and gray with lank brown hair. He wore a European waiter's jacket over Bromfkidoran street clothes with the slightly jarring fashion note of bright red basketball shoes on his feet.

I ordered the special with a bottle of "Molad" beer and was about to dig in when I noticed the man. He was ordering from the waiter in a minority dialect of the Bromfkidoran language.

He was really old and definitely not Bromfkidoran, Black rather than gray. Precious few Americans speak any Bromfkidoran at all, even at Harvard, let alone the localized form which this man spoke. The only reason I noticed was because I had started my masters thesis on comparative Bromfkidoran language before I decided I didn't really need a master's degree after all.

This led me to believe that this was a man with a story. It has always been my particular weakness to pursue old folks who might have a story to tell, for how else am I going to learn any of the really important things in this world?

The man looked to be about seventy years old but not the least bit burdened with the maladies which so often accompany old age. Even though he was sitting I could tell that he stood at least six foot three. About his person there was an atmosphere of serenity. In the hope of making his acquaintance I had a bottle of Molad sent to his table, and waited.

As I was lingering over my second beer, another set itself down across the table from me, firmly held in a muscular black paw.

"I wanted to thank you for the beer, young fella, do you mind if I join you for a moment?"

To my surprise, his accent was not Bromfkidoran but Californian with a touch of the whole world thrown in.

"It was my pleasure, I was hoping that you would be able to talk to me for a little while. I have hardly ever heard a non gray man speak more than a few words of Bromfkidoran."

I pointed to the waiter.

"Mister D'mokal over there will attest that I am one of the very few who come in here who even pronounces the menu correctly and this only because I devoted myself to the study of the language for some time. The NATIONAL language, that is, not the old minority dialect I heard coming from you."

"Mister D'mokal is a Pojojan and he looked like he might be cheered by hearing his native dialect."

"How on earth did you acquire such fluency?"

"I spent some time in the far south."

this was virtually unheard of, Bromfkidor is one of the most closed of closed nations. Only a very few of their number live outside of Bromfkidor or her subject lands. The owner of this restaurant was one of the very few exceptions.

"Really," I said, "When?"

"Long ago, before the unpleasantness in Patagonia."

Again, this was startling news, for as every school boy knows the Patagonian invasion was in 1914.

"You don't look that old!"

"I'm ninety-nine."

"Wow! The years have treated you very well indeed!"

The man chuckled, A deep resonant sound which filled the room somehow without being louder than conversational speech.

"Clean living, I guess."

It was silent for a beat or two.

"My name is Seth Deitch." I said.

"Woodrow Hammond, pleased to meet you Mister Deitch."

Woodrow Hammond! I had thought him to have been dead for years! His handshake conveyed a sensation of enormous power held under tight control. I was apparent that this man was immensely strong.

"So, you were really in Bromfkidor? Before the first war?"

"I was."

"I would really like to hear about your experiences, that is , if you don't mind."

"No, I don't mind, I just haven't thought of those days in a very long time."

To hear this man's story from his own lips would be the opportunity of a lifetime. Woodrow Hammond was a legend. This was the man who conquered the sky.

We agreed to dine together the next evening where he would begin to tell me of his early days in the land beneath the world.

CHAPTER ONE

The narrative of Woodrow Hammond

I was born on the sixth of September 1877 in San Francisco. My father was a cowboy turned merchant. He had punched cattle not only in California, but in the U.S. and Canada as well. Feeling he had gotten too old for the trail he went into the business of providing supplies to cowpokes in all three nations as well as Mexico by mail order.

Although things were better for Negroes in California than in the United States, it wasn't all rosy, if you know what I mean. Colored folks officially had equal rights, could hold office, work where they pleased and such, but that doesn't keep one man from calling another "Nigger" if he needs to blame someone else for his own problems. We had our own neighborhoods and businesses and were casually regarded as inferior to anybody but a Chinaman. This started to change when I was a little one. In '82 a black man became prime minister of the Empire and over the years of my boyhood, race relations in California slowly started to improve.

My childhood was one of rough and tumble sport and roguish misbehavior. I was a street fighter and a gambler with little sense of right and wrong and was a constant source of worry to my parents. It is the great shame of my youth that I could not live up to the values which those good people tried to instill in me. Had I but listened to them with more care I would not have had to gain my social education the hard way. I was a young "street savage", I know now really more animal than man. The only life I foresaw for myself involved being in and out of jail for the remainder of my life.

On one occasion, having been apprehended by the police for a minor robbery, I was introduced to, what we called in those days, a "Charity Lady" named Amilia Andrews. This lady had never married but had come from money which she had decided to invest in helping wayward young people find the right path in life. It turned out that I was smart enough to be trained as an executive secretary.

So here I was in 1899, a well paid organizational aide with the instincts of a street gladiator. Little did I know then how well the combination would serve me in the future.

My first job was for a minor official in the Imperial government. It was while I was working here that I was brought to the attention of Mister Richardson of the Diplomatic department due to my adept interception of a embarrassingly mis-worded memo. In short order I was hired on as his personal aide.

Mister William P. Richardson was a very successful career diplomat who had distinguished himself in many difficult situations. One of the most notable was the crisis of 1885, where he helped prevent war with the United

States and set in motion the events which would lead to the acquisition of South Alaska and the Hawaiian Islands for the Empire of California.

He was impressed with the way I ran the office and further he had a personal interest in the betterment of Negroes being the son of Virginia planter who had kept over seventy five of my people in bondage, a situation which he had found personally immoral even as a child. He offered me a proposition which I could not pass up. I would become his personal aide and make his front office run smoothly at a high salary with opportunities for travel and education, and he would have a very visible black man on his executive staff.

By 1902 I had visited over fourteen nations and observed high international negotiations first hand. No one saw Mister Richardson who did not first see me. On one occasion I had the War Minister of Germany try to bribe me for a better seat at a bargaining session, on another I was ordered to keep the Prince of Wales waiting "just for effect". All of this gave me a lot of education which I had missed out on earlier in life. In hindsight it seems that this all was intended to prepare me for the events of 1903.

Our young nation was having difficulty with the kingdom of Denmark over trade and over incidents involving some of our scientific expeditions in Greenland. While it wasn't a critical situation, there was still a need to make some gesture of cooperation. The king, Christian IX, felt that our emperor, William II, was unwilling to participate as an equal partner with European heads of state in the pursuit of world security and had repeatedly brought up his pet project of a multi-national diplomatic mission to the newly discovered land of Bromfkidor, located in the strange temperate region in the interior of the Antarctic continent. With the consent of the Emperor and the Prime Minister, Mister Richardson proposed a plan whereby California would help with the mission if the Danes could persuade at least three other nations to participate. He was under the, (it turned out mistaken,) impression that no one cared about the republic at the bottom of the world.

Within a week of having made this proposal, Denmark announced that FOUR other countries had agreed to participate in the joint mission. So, in February 1903, along with missions from Russia, France, Great Britain and Argentina, the Danes and the Californians set out upon a collaboration designed to find them common ground.

We embarked on an icebreaker from Buenos Aires on the third of the month in fine weather but calm as the sea was, the French ambassador still found a way to become seasick.

As we steamed down the coast we saw the shores of a land very different from the Argentina of today. All along the shores we saw happy, thriving towns without walls or underground shelters. Pre-Bromfkidoran Patagonia

was a beautiful land and I am one of the few alive who remembers it. Today it is a sterile, shattered unoccupied wasteland. A former base camp for conquest.

Our rendezvous point was at a location in inner Palmer Land, or as the natives now refer to it "Palmeroj", their version of our name for the place. For the Bromfkidorans this was a distant outpost in the vast land they call the "Outer Waste" the sparsely populated frigid zone which surrounds the verdant land which is their world.

Our entire party would sit on the shore of this forbidding land for three days awaiting contact from our hosts.

Chapter Two

Journey to Szojana

Late on the third day of our stay on the barren rocky shore, David Kendall, secretary to Mister Oldfeild, the British ambassador, heard a sound in the distance, like a drumming or beating. We were on the shore, to the east was naught but ocean, to the west a vast icy desert, to the south a low range of hills. It was from these hills that the sound which we could all now hear quite plainly emanated. Louder and louder it grew and as it did so the sound became more complex as we were able to hear pipes and horns as well as those of what were now obviously drums and chimes. From the south we saw a great light bursting over the hills, and let me tell you son, the vision of Ezekiel would have startled me less than what next my eyes beheld. Over the hill swept a huge, lens-shaped, ship of the sky flanked by six smaller cigar shaped ships. The flagship must have been at very least fifteen hundred feet in diameter, the escort ships about four hundred feet long each. It was from this huge aerial flotilla that the throbbing music originated.

As the ships surmounted the hills we started to notice some details. From the underside of each ship depended a great mast which seemed to serve as some sort of balancing mechanism. From those masts, as well as from other points on the ships hung ropes which we saw, as they came lower were dragging on the ground making line shaped furrows in the snow as if it was being plowed for planting. Making their way down those ropes, with seemingly supernatural speed were men, who as their feet touched the ground started running in our direction.

The man who reached us first was a sight to behold, six foot six, if he was an inch with a face gray as a thunderhead. His eyes were emerald green and seemed, hawk like, to track every movement we made. He was clad in feathery parka of brilliant, tropical colors, so far the brightest thing we had seen in this gray and desolate land.

When the man introduced himself it was the biggest shock of all, for he spoke in only slightly accented Danish.

"I am lieutenant Dzhidro Alprendauro and I am your escort to the capital city. While the captain of the Bontor Do'alina is your official host, I, being the only one of the crew schooled in European languages, will serve as your contact for the trip. There is no insult to be implied by this, it is only a measure of expediency." He repeated this message in English, French, Spanish and Russian with varying degrees of fluency, I did see members of the French party endeavoring to stifle laughter.

As the lieutenant made his introductions, a large cable car was descending toward us from the belly of the gigantic central ship which was now keeping station directly above us. In spite of the high winds it remained steady as it settled upon then icy rocks. The car was fully twice as large as one of the

street cars of my native San Francisco. Alprendauro indicated that we should enter and make ourselves comfortable.

The lieutenant saw to it that all parties were seated comfortably aboard the car which was the picture of opulence and luxury. Various members of our party, including myself expressed wonder at the advancement of the art of aviation in this nation. We asked mister Rosas, the Argentine ambassador, to explain our bemusement in this matter, for Spanish was the language the young officer seemed to have the least difficulty with. Mister Alprendauro was more than forthcoming in his response, which I understood perfectly, for Spanish is the second official language of California.

He said, "It is the great pride of our civilization that we have such command of the sky. To become a skyman has been the lifelong dream of each and every man aboard these ships. Only thirty years have passed since the first sky ships were launched and in that time the world has been united largely through their use. The skyships brought down the old world and raised up the new. Now we call ourselves the 'People of the Sky'".

We were all transfixed, not so much at the description of how technology had transformed their world, but rather by the almost religious tone in which it was related. This would be only the first of many times I would hear this reverence regarding Bromfkidoran ways.

Even at this early point in my adventure I was already consumed with wonder at this amazing new people. Less than ten years ago this land was a complete unknown, thought to be only a barren waste of endless frozen rock. It was only in 1896 when the Danish explorer, Arnesen, thought dead for over a half a year reappeared on the Palmer peninsula with a wild tale of a lost civilization that we gained any hint that this mysterious continent might shelter something more than merely rock and ice.

The car was drawn up into a notch in the bottom of the aerial leviathan where it was locked into place with a firm click. We heard doors being unfastened from the outside and then they swung aside revealing a broad corridor which curved away from view about seventy yards from us. Lined up on either side of the door was an honor guard composed of twenty men all over six foot five and decked out in the most fabulous costumes I had ever seen, rivaling even those of the Ottoman Imperial entourage. Each man held a weapon, some were modern, others archaic. I saw what were obviously firearms side by side with stone axes lashed to rough wooden shafts and everything in between. The men spoke in chorus a few phrases in the Bromfkidoran language and turned away from the door. The lieutenant told us to follow where they lead. Again in Spanish he told us that the weapons of all ages symbolized that they viewed war as a practice which they have put behind them.

As we walked the corridor we were able to get a glimpse of men going about the various tasks associated with the running of a great skyship, reefing the slack from the gas cells, running a galley and performing maintenance upon the engines which drove this incredible vessel. We had to walk up a spiral ramp to the room where we would be welcomed aboard by the captain. I had to constantly remind myself that I was in a ship high amongst the clouds and not in some great palace, so immense was Bontor Do'alina. The captain came down from the bridge to see us. He was tall even for a Bromfkidoran at about seven feet and had a very prominent, beak like nose surmounted by thoughtful looking green eyes which gave him the overall appearance of some sort of benign eagle. He was introduced as captain Sharold Zandt and that the name of his ship was translated as "Mountain in the Sky", a name we could well understand. Through the Lieutenant's translation he invited our party up to the bridge.

A few short steps up a lacquered wood staircase brought us all to the command center of the ship which was perched far forward on the leading edge of the giant craft. Behind us was a vast expanse of the upper deck of the ship, a total area of no less than ten acres, interrupted here and there with vents and windows and far toward the stern, the great propeller masts.

Rising from the center of this area was a tall flagpole bearing the colors of this lost nation. Proportionally more like a pennant, the flag was much shorter hoist to fly than the flags of California or the U.S.. It had a dark blue canton with a single gold star divided at a sharp angle from a representation of the sky over a green earth. Before us was the splendid vista of the Antarctic wilderness which these folk refer to as the "Outer Waste". From our high altitude we could see how it stretches unbroken for hundreds of miles. A sharp order was given by the captain and we heard a great roar as the propellers came to life. Slowly at first and then with greater speed the ship and its escort turned and headed inland. We learned that our destination was a town called Szojana which is a supply center for ships operating in the Outer Waste. From there we would be taken to the capital city, Tippilina, where we would meet with the Senate and have an audience with the King.

Chapter Three

The Outpost

When one encounters a town in the Outer Waste, it is not the town itself that you first see. Even from miles away in the sky you can see the water mine which, if the settlement has been there for any length of time, is far larger than the town itself. You see, rivers don't flow through this frigid wilderness but water is just about everywhere all frozen as ice. In order to use it the people have to cut up the ice in chunks and carry it back to the

town where it can be melted and used for drinking, cooking and washing. On the other side of the town is big grayish brown patch where used water and sewage have been dumped.

The water mining is done with saws, explosives and skyships and goes on constantly, for Szojana is a busy port and not only uses water itself, but supplies the sky traffic which passes through. Most of the settlement is underground and cannot be easily seen from the air but the water mine is a large area of denuded rock where hundreds of people can be seen laboring as they load the cargo into small heavy lift skyships for return to town.

The town itself can be seen only as a series of docking masts at the crest of a hill. Our convoy was fast approaching one of those masts after a day and a half of travel and in spite of the luxury afforded us aboard Bontor Do'alina, we were all eager to get our first look at an entire population of these "People of the Sky"

We were informed that we would stay a short while at this small town and again rode the cable car toward what seemed like an impossibly small loading dock in the hillside. Size, it turns out is hard to judge in environment of unbroken white and the loading dock actually was able to accommodate six to ten of these cars at a time. There were in fact several unused ones just inside the doors behind the landing area.

The car was detached from the cables and we were moved inside with great speed to make room for the multitude of cars now descending. It seems just and fitting that in this strange land that the car felt much less steady on solid earth than it did in the air and so it was that we felt the most jostling of the entire trip at this point of our journey. As we looked behind we saw dozens of cars ascending and descending and in this way most of the crew and passengers were unloaded from the ships while supplies were sent aloft.

We were led out of the station area into a street which was roofed over with glass panels. All along either side were shops and apartment blocks which rose to the ceiling about fifty feet up. The temperature inside was a comfortable sixty or sixty-five degrees compared with the profound cold just outside.

We were taken to a hotel, a barracks really, and were settled in for our stay.

It was the Antarctic summer and the sun remained in the sky almost twenty four hours a day at this latitude and season. The result was that I could not sleep and found myself full of energy in spite of the fact it was past my usual time for retirement. In another part of the barracks I found lieutenant Alprendauro and I asked him what he was doing, I thought he might like to talk. He said that he was off duty and was going for a drink, perhaps I would like to join him?

The little place he took me to, I don't know whether to call it a tavern or a coffee shop, was filled with people of all types and classes. Businessmen and skyship captains drank side by side with "ten malat men", that is men who made the minimum wage of ten "malat" a day.

Here I was introduced to what would become my favorite beverage on this or any continent, the famous "Molad Beer". In this remote land there is neither hops nor barley, the grain used being a oat-like plant called "lorva", the bittering agent an herb somewhere between dill and hops in flavor known as "taina". The result from the fermentation of these ingredients is a wonderfully refreshing, effervescent potable of a light amber color.

It was in this place also that I caught my first glimpse of Bromfkidoran womanhood. The average Bromfkidoran woman is about the same height as the average American man and prone to have a hairstyle which further accentuates her height. Their garments are like those of the men in general style but with a tighter cut which accentuates the figure. Ankle length skirts are the standard, usually in bright colors. The necklines tend to be cut very low over the bosom, which on the typical woman displays a very generous cleavage indeed. It was only much later that I would learn that this had an economic as well as a social reason. The Bromfkidoran woman produces milk all her life and is the sole source of dairy products in this land with no mammals. The size of a woman's bosom is said to be of pecuniary importance to a potential mate and a symbol of status for her husband. All I can say was that there were many in this room to make their men rich.

I would also hear that evening my second sample of Bromfkidoran music, the first being the greeting fanfare of the Bontor Do'alina. Four men were seated in a corner of the room playing rather interesting, slightly syncopated strains of melody and harmony. While the scale was not quite like ours, the notes didn't sound sour to my ear. I was reminded a little of the so called "Jug Bands" I had heard in the southern U.S. and also a little of the wedding music of the Jewish people in Russia who I had encountered in my travels. In my later years I would become an eager student of these musical forms but on this day it was merely very foreign and slightly uncouth.

The lieutenant insisted that I call him Dzhidro which was his given name. I in turn told him that some of my closer friends called me Woody and invited him to do so as well. His story is of no small interest and I will relate as much of it as I can remember.

I expect that I will be a little vague about the details because of the enormous quantity of beer that I consumed that night.

Dzhidro B. Alprendauro was born in 1879 in the city of Darmal which is now called Tippilina. That year the "Formation War" was in its final days. The separate nations of this region had surrendered before the dominance of

the world government of Dzhidro Bogadnij, warlord of Darmal. The people of this city regarded this man as the most heroic figure of the age, within a year the whole of the Antarctic world would as well. This is the man who would become the first king of united Bromfkidor and every other male child born that year would be given some form of his name.

There were some startling similarities between our lives, the young lieutenant and I. He too, was born in the formative days of an emerging young nation. He too, had a wayward youth from which he was rescued by caring individuals to find a career as a skyship officer. He made it clear that to serve in the sky navy was one of the high honors afforded by this society, and he was proud as a man could be to have attained his present position. The city in which he was born, the new capital of Bromfkidor, was renamed Tippilina in honor of the men who served in the skyships. The name means "People of the Sky".

During his service he had been on many missions of exploration in the outer waste. This last journey, the one which had picked up our party, was the farthest he had ever been. The shores of the ocean had only been visited by a few scientific missions in the short years since contact with the outside. Dzhidro told me that even the existence of the world outside the outer waste is regarded by the man on the street as nothing more than a crackpot rumor, but he himself is now convinced, having seen with his own eyes the great ocean, and even the tip of the neighboring continent.

For Dzhidro, life as a skyman gave all the pleasure and fulfillment that a man could desire. I ought to tell you that then, Bromfkidor was not nearly as cosmopolitan as it is today, and Dzhidro got real excitement out of visiting strange corners of the realm in the pursuit of his duties. He also noted to me in confidence that a sky officer was considered a real catch by the provincial girls and they would often make him feel *very* at home in the hopes of making him a husband. Further, he felt that he had a vital role to play in the unification of the world. Although Bromfkidor was united politically, there were still groups vying for power and seeking to divide the people in all kinds of ways. There had even been local military uprisings which had to be put down. In one of these Dzhidro had been taken prisoner by the "Kozar's Republic Army" and held for four days before the tiny cadre was arrested. The man was philosophical, even gay, in his response to these experiences for he had been part of the history of his nation.

In the morning, I awoke with a headache that was the sure penalty of the previous night's drinking. Dzhidro met me at my room within an hour of my rising and seemed in somewhat worse shape than myself. Nonetheless he declared himself ready to guide me back to the ship and thence to continue our journey to Tippilina, the seat of government in this remote land

Now let me tell you that had I been at my best that morning the results of the events which followed would have been very different. In my slightly out of sorts condition my reflexes were not up to snuff, otherwise I would have been on the alert for the assailant who struck both me and the lieutenant on the head. As it was I like to think that I at least fell to the floor with a little grace and dignity.

Chapter Four

Abducted

Did I mention that I was a quick study at languages? Be that as it may... as I slowly made my way back toward consciousness I found myself understanding some of what was being said around me. toward consciousness I found myself understanding some of what was being said around me.

"still I say that with one of the foreigners in our hands, the Senate will have to at least listen to our position. "

"Perhaps, but this man is only an assistant, we know nothing of their customs, as far as we know this man is entirely expendable!"

"How can he be expendable? He is the largest and strongest!"

The next voice I heard was definitely a woman's.

"You must abandon the idea that these people are savages! They are diplomats, not warriors. They do, however represent great military power."

"Then you are saying that the position of the Senate is correct?"

"I am saying that we must approach them with an alternative proposition rather than back them into a corner. If we make them look like fools before the world then we will never win their willing support."

As my head cleared, it became apparent that I had become an unwitting pawn in an internal matter of the country, I attempted to feign unconsciousness for a little longer in the hope that I might gain further information of my captor's intentions.

"Our position," said the first voice, "is much more beneficial to the mission of the foreigners than is that of the Senate. It is not impossible that he may choose to help us voluntarily."

Another voice entered the conversation, another man.

"How could this man travel with us unnoticed? Have you ever seen such a man, black as the winter night?"

"For that, he could become a visible symbol of our cause."

"Let me remind you that in many of the outer lands, his kind hold a lesser status than do the Kozars in ours! One of their empires had to fight a great and bloody civil war just to free some of his kind from abject slavery, and this in living memory!"

I could no longer keep myself from stirring and so allowed one eye to open. I now realized that I was being slowly rocked back and forth as if I was on a boat. It was now revealed to me that I was a passenger on a small skyship far less steady than the great and weighty Bontor Do'alina. It was also revealed to me that my captors were two men and a woman. One of the men was the man who knocked out Dzhidro and myself and the other was of a type that I had not yet seen in Bromfkidor for he had dark olive skin rather than the gray which seemed to be the prevailing sort. Also he stood only about five foot ten inches, making him a dwarf in these parts. I would later learn that this fellow represented a minority known as the "Mosains" who were followers of a very law and tradition oriented religion. The woman was of the standard Bromfkidoran stock although rather an exceptional example for she was without a doubt one of the loveliest women that ever I had seen. She embodied all of the finest physical features found in her people.

Her nose, although prominent, was so finely formed that it seemed not to dominate but rather to enhance her features and particularly the character which shone in her deep jade green eyes. Her hair was a full, wavy chestnut cascade which shined like a tiger eye stone. Further she possessed in the best

possible way those attributes which I have previously noted to be so pronounced amongst her people. A great beauty to be sure but I could not in this moment of disadvantage allow myself to be distracted by pulchritude.

"Look, he is awake!" she exclaimed.

"We will be lucky if he hasn't been rendered an idiot by the blow Shopari gave him." said the short man.

"Be quiet, Kohain. I know my business, and I can tell you that it will take quite a bit more than a knock on the head to stop this one."

"Shopari," said the woman, "why must we do this? This is a mistake, we have representatives among the Guides, they can make our case. This is how a WAR starts!"

The tone in which she said the word 'war' led me to believe that it might just be the most vile word in her vocabulary.

For the first time I spoke using my sketchy knowledge of the Bromfkidoran language.

"Were am I? Why am I here? Who are you people?" I thought that all of these were germane questions regarding my situation.

The one who they called Shopari answered me.

"Woodrow Hammond," he said, "allow me to introduce myself and my colleagues. I am Dzhonith Shopari, until a few months ago I sat at the King's Table as a Senator. This man is Lenar Kohain, a great teacher and philosopher. The lady is Princess Ola Sharomna, heiress to the throne of Pojona."

"I wish," I replied, "that I could say I was pleased to meet you."

"Partner Hammond, it is possible that upon hearing me out that you may find that we have quite a few goals in common."

I snapped back, "'Partner' Shopari, you have placed yourself in a very bad position! I myself am a person of no great power and can do you or your 'cause' no good. On the other hand, I am the personal aide to ambassador William P. Richardson who is in the direct service of his Imperial Majesty, William II, Emperor of California and all its subject possessions. By abducting me you have made a hostile act against my government!"

Shopari seemed unmoved by my statement.

"Mister Hammond," he said, as if addressing a child, "you are speaking from a position of almost total ignorance. I am aware that people from the outside know but little of the true face of my country, had you stayed with your official party, you would have had little opportunity to learn more. Would it surprise you to learn that this is the active policy of the King's Table?"

"What utter nonsense!" I responded, "How on earth could it serve your government's interests to shroud itself in mystery. We must come to know each other to achieve diplomatic relations and trade."

"How little you know of 'my government' is summed up by your statement. Let me tell you the story of how Bromfkidor as we know it today came into existence. The official name for this land is 'Stomo Nomchitka do Bromfkidoro'"

I now had enough of a handle on the language to know that the meaning of these words was roughly, Parliament of Nations of the United World. It didn't take me more than a second or two to figure out what he was talking about.

"Bromfkidor is the world?"

Shopari continued, "A little more than twenty years ago king Dzhidro Bogadnij united the warring nations under his authority and on the moral foundation of a united world government being the only way by which mankind might endure upon the earth. Over the intervening years this has become the 'Great Principle' of our civilization. there is no truth greater, no dogma more binding. Seven years ago we learned that the world was very much bigger than first we thought. In that year I sat at the King's Table in the last year of my elected term. While those around me argued that the Great Principle was the only basis for action, I put forward the idea that we might have to play by the rules of the outside world. Being my last year at the Table my power to persuade was not as great as it might have been in the past. Because I was a friend of the king, I was able to extract from him the promise of a fifteen year moratorium on any military action that we might have time to learn of the outside before bringing them into the 'World'".

"My dear friend, the king Meskrin D'Rohuki, is now a very old man, his most likely successor is Buerno Montolla a champion of early enactment of the Great Principal. So you can see why there can be no diplomacy. Our king and parliament can extend recognition to no government but our own.

So here was the reality of the situation in this land, for I could sense the measure of the man before me and knew he spoke naught but the truth.

"Bromfkidor, for all its great strength, cannot stand against the entire world! It would be the most insane folly to challenge the united forces of Europe, Asia, the Americas! Madness!"

"United!? Even with our sparse knowledge of your world, we can see that you are far, far from united! There are over one hundred and fifty separate, distinct governments outside Bromfkidor, most of whom are the sworn enemy of at least one other nation!"

The truth of this was beyond dispute. I merely nodded as Shopari continued. "It is the plan of the Senate and the military to plant spies and

pay collaborators in your nations for the purpose of inciting world conflict of the most horrifying type. If they can induce your kings and presidents to use up troops, materiel and money in useless, general conflict, then, for them, the course is easy. With your cities in ruin and your factories and farms laid waste, your empires a mere shadow of their former power, the sky men of Bromfkidor shall come to restore order. Yes, there would be some fighting, but with our collaborators having paved the way, most of your people would bend to their will without any trouble, in fact many would welcome them."

I was chilled to the bone by the vividness of Shopari's recitation. My feelings of overwhelming helplessness almost won me over in that moment.

Thankfully my musings were interrupted when a crewman served me a hot meal.

Chapter Five Into Bromfkidor

The next morning found a surprising warmth permeating the cabin of the tiny ship. Looking out through the window as I slowly found my way toward wakefulness I saw a blue, cloud speckled sky like that of a spring day back in California rather than the flat, slate gray expanse which I had come to know in the far south.

I rose and made my way to a port that I could see where I was and was greeted by a vista which was unnervingly familiar

There could be no doubt that I beheld the Napa valley of my native land unfolding before my still sleep-caked eyes.

Behind me I heard the mellifluous voice of Ola Sharomna.

"This is Bromfkidor, not that cold outer waste. This is my beloved motherland, my world."

I had yet to use my vocal chords that morning so the words I spoke came out only as a croaking whisper,

"So it is." I said.

As the day matured the ship gained an escort of peculiar winged creatures which seemed to fall somewhere between bats and birds in structure. These were, of course, representatives of the unique vertebrate class to which all Brofkdoran animals, save humans belonged, the Avisaur.

Shortly after the remains of the ill-fated Arnesen expedition returned to Europe, Princeton University in the United States sent a team of naturalists into Bromfkidor to study the indigenous flora and fauna. The plant life proved to be rather like that of neighboring South America, but the animals were another matter.

Warm blooded but lacking milk glands of any description, they could have scales, hair or feathers or any combination thereof. The young were born in leathery eggs and were usually only about five percent the size of the parent at birth, much smaller than either bird or mammal babies. Were it not for the obvious characteristic of warm bloodedness the naturalists would have placed them with the dinosaurs of ancient times, as it was they created a new class to encompass them until such a time that they can be properly studied.

The particular creatures who joined us on this morning would at first glance be mistaken for seagulls until one noticed that they were covered with smooth fur rather than feathers and trailed behind them a long tail with a small rudder at the tip. The Princess called them "Farnoud", and said that we would no doubt net a few for our next meal.

Ola Sharomna captivated my eye with her every move and word for it was from her that I was now taking my lessons in things Bromfkidoran. While at first I resented her for having taken part in my abduction, she eventually made it clear to me that it was not her wish to harm me or the purpose of my nation's mission. Gradually I became better disposed toward her, before too long, however, she became the sun which I was in orbit of. The truth was that this earnest young beauty had worked a spell upon me and I became her most willing victim.

She educated me to their system of writing and over the next few days I took control of my own learning.

At the end of the fourth day we put into port at Nomchit Sharomna the traditional estate of Ola's family.

I had learned from my reading that this must be a very old estate because it was situated in a valley beside a road marking it as being from pre skyship times when the principal commerce of this land was conducted by cart and coach. The house itself was a wonderful structure which showed its centuries of use with extraordinary good grace. From this family had come the last ruling dynasty of Pojona, one of the old nations which make up the new Bromfkidor. It did not strike me as the least bit strange to see this fallen

clan fighting to regain a foothold in the halls of the powerful, indeed it was a phenomena which I have seen time and again throughout the world.

Although all I had heard and read had made me sympathetic to the basic reasons for this rebellion, I still believed in my heart that the simple will to regain power was at the core of it. I would in time discover that my assumption was in error, but then I determined to make my escape at the first moment that the opportunity presented itself.

This opportunity came a little sooner than expected in the form of a sport hunting expedition in the unsettled land outside the estate. One of the indigenous creatures, although like most native animals an avisaurian, was about the same size and temperament of the wild boar of Europe and Asia. Not only was it palatable in the extreme, it also presented the hunter with a tricky challenge as it was a particularly canny beast.

Since these creatures, known as "maredij" tended to emerge from their dens at twelve hour intervals, we set out at a time that my body insisted was very early morning, although, of course the sun had neither risen nor set in two months. I was equipped with some dried food for the day, a canteen and a peculiar firearm which resembled the long barreled rifles used by the Mongols of east Asia, save that it had a revolving magazine somewhat like that of a six shooter. Some of our group were designated as scouts and were mounted on the backs of large ostrich like avisaurians which could run at an amazing speed. Although fierce in appearance and given to making the most menacing growls, these were in fact loyal and intelligent mounts who, because of their two footedness, could go places that no horse ever could. The rest of us were on foot so that we could make our way in and out of the stands of trees with greater ease. In truth, I doubt that I could have mastered one of the strange mounts at that time anyway.

For several hours we stalked amongst the trees with one of another of us occasionally taking a shot at a maredij, every so often successfully. As the day wore on we spread out from one another to pursue separate quarry, and this I seized as my chance.

Having made my way away from the rest of the party, I now found myself in an open glade surrounded by tall trees. The wind shifted restlessly through the high branches making a soft rushing sound. Leathery winged lizard-birds of a hundred bright colors flitted from limb to limb of their verdant aerie.

Presently the rustling of the leaves became overlaid with another, more alien sound which put me immediately on the alert, for this was the unmistakable trade mark of the mountain lion of my native land. As I surveyed the stand of trees I raised the strange Bromfkidoran firearm to my shoulder and held my breath.

In the next short moment which followed a cry split the air the like of which I was certain that no man could ever have heard without then and there dropping stone dead of pure undiluted terror. Two of the great trees which had stood at the edge of the glade, no doubt, for centuries, were suddenly shattered into matchwood as a beast from some fevered nightmare pushed them aside as a man would a beaded curtain.

The monster was some type of avisaurian of the kind which make up the majority of the Bromfkidoran fauna, but up until this moment I had seen none larger than a bull. This behemoth could have, without difficulty looked over a one story house. It stood on two legs like some giant ostrich or a kangaroo and was decorated with a coronet of brilliant feathers upon its head as well as on the frighteningly taloned arms giving it the overall aspect of a gigantic bird of prey. The mouth, however was not the least bit birdlike, for it was lined with a terrifying battery of teeth each one like a serrated bayonet.

Its saucer eyes found me in an instant and again the banshee roar pierced the air sending a wild snowstorm of lizard birds fleeing in all directions.

I fired once, twice, three times and on all shots my aim was true, but still the creature advanced, little discouraged by my onslaught. The screaming demon now leapt from behind the broken remains of the ancient trees to punish me for my insolence in raising arms against the Lord of the Forest, for this he surely was. In that the monster had cleared fifty feet in that one leap, I knew that nothing more than the death of a coward would be gained by flight, therefore I elected to stand my ground to the bitter end which I confidently expected within the next few seconds. Taking aim for the enormous eyes of the creature, I discharged shot after shot as the beast roared in pain and anger, and then I heard what I knew in the depths of my soul would be the last sound I would ever hear, the firing pin falling on an empty chamber. I squeezed shut my eyes against the call of oblivion but felt only a great vibration in the earth.

Opening my eyes I saw a mere three yards from my feet the monster's head upon the ground. I had by sheer dumb luck felled this mightiest of hunters. I would like to be able to say that I calmly surveyed my prize like one of the great heroes of old, but fact had it that I was dizzy and close to swooning. Although I did not succumb, I did at that time find it convenient to deposit the contents of my stomach on the ground beside the gigantic corpse.

In spite of the stark terror that it had caused me, I realized that this too was opportunity. Quickly as I could I sliced several strips of meat from the now inert giant of the forest and threw them into my game bag. I had only limited ammunition and this would carry me for several meals after I smoked it

over a fire of fresh twigs. I set out at a run in a direction at right angles to that from which the monster came and made my way for freedom.

Now I was grateful for the lack of night as the only thing to make me pause would be actual fatigue rather than darkness.

In my time at the estate I had had a chance to consult maps so I knew that if I continued in this direction for a day or so I would reach the Molad river. Follow against the current and eventually I would reach the confluence with the Darwa and the foothills of High Darmal, the mountain upon which the city of Tippilina was built.

Chapter Six

Alone in the Wilds

After a day and a half of walking, I spotted a camp of people who appeared to be some kind of nomads. Their clothing was of a different cut than that of the folk I had encountered thus far.

I was not at this time as used to the outdoor life as I would become in later years and I found myself yearning for human contact and hot food. Upright and with my hands in full view I walked into the little encampment and called out greetings in the Bromfkidoran language.

It had completely slipped my mind how strange my appearance was to these people, but as it was, I was quickly reminded. Had a man from Mars stepped into that circle of tents and wagons, I do believe the reaction would have been more subdued. Men and women leapt to their feet and dropped their tasks. Children clung to their mothers and stared in wonder.

After an uncomfortable pause a man approached me holding up both his hands to show he bore no weapons and spoke.

"Are you a man?" he asked in a slightly apologetic voice.

"Of course I'm a man," I replied, "but I am not a man of Bromfkidor."

"How can it be that you are not of the World?" he said "A Kozar may not be fooled by such obvious lies. Yes, you are a man, but you are some game of nature, an omen perhaps."

This was the first mention I had experienced of anything supernatural during my sojourn in the south. Even the religions of Bromfkidor seem to be curiously free of references to omens, prophecy and miracles. These, I suspected, were a people apart.

I felt that it would be in my best interest to make friends with these nomads.

"It is true that I was born beyond the Outer Waste, across a huge stretch of water in a country called California which is itself as big as half of Bromfkidor. My skin is brown rather than gray because I am descended from people who came from a land which is most likely to big for you to imagine called Africa. There were others with me, most of whom looked different from either me or you, they have white skins and they come from different countries some small, some large."

I fear that my explanation served to confuse rather than clarify who I was. The Kozar headman finally spoke.

"Whoever you are, you are dirty and half starved. Come and sit at our table and entertain us with more of your mad tales."

Thus was it that I became a guest of the nomads of Bromfkidor.

The headman was named Halord Bishindi and was in charge by virtue of patriarchy. Over half of the little band were his direct descendants.

I saw no reason to keep my situation a secret, so I told them exactly how I had come to be among them. Almost rude was their response to the idea that Bromfkidor would even recognize any other government, the only way to be separate from Stomo Nomchitka do Bromfkidoro, is to not recognize it! This statement drew huge peals of laughter from those assembled.

It turned out that the Kozars are thought to be racially inferior to the dominant ethnic groups of the land.

"In my land, we also suffer from racial bigotry even though we have seen that it can lead to disaster, sometimes in unexpected ways."

"I has certainly been an inconvenience to us." said Halord, sardonically.

"In the lands that I come from it has created our world." I said. "Just before I was born, my country was part of another nation called the United States of America. That land had just fought a huge and bloody civil war over whether or not my people could be held in slavery in certain parts of the country. The anti slavery faction won and my people were now free citizens, but many of the white people who still controlled the government, the money and just about everything else, wanted to make sure that we didn't gain any power. Since the government was in the control of the anti-slavery party, it started a nation wide program called 'reconstruction'. The idea was

to muster blacks into the greater part of society, but it was done a little awkwardly, and some of the whites just got more and more angry at the way things were going."

"The greatest general of the conflict had become the leader of the entire nation, we call him a 'president', and as a symbol he had chosen as his vice president a black man, like me. His name was Hiram T. Johnson, and he was the founder of my country not because he was loved but because he was hated.

The General was not a very good administrator and was blamed for a huge error in the national banking system. The scandal was so very great that he was compelled to resign his office. In the United States, it is the law when a president cannot complete his term of office, the vice president takes over his job. In this case the vice president was one of the supposedly inferior black people, like myself." I pointed to my own face.

"Even those who supported the idea of a black vice president had never thought that he would ever become the leader of the whole country, and chaos tore through the whole fabric of government. The new president couldn't perform his duties without interference from all sides, all because of the color of his skin."

"In the meanwhile, the part of the nation that would become my country was in turmoil because of a criminal governor bleeding the populace of all they had. This land was a frontier built by men and women who were pioneers and bold individuals. To them the solution was simple, they hung the governor."

"So now they had an ineffective national government and no state government so they decided they had had enough and started their own country. In the city of San Francisco lived a man who had said that he was Emperor of America. He said this because he was not quite in his right mind, but unlike the governor, the people liked him. As the state government descended into chaos, the people of that city looked to him as the highest authority and they endorsed his claim to power. He had been issuing money, supporting charity and making proclamations, all of which were generally accepted by the populace. The endorsement was taken up by influential people throughout the state and before long our land was transformed. His name was Joshua Norton and he declared California separate from the United States, whose government was in such a shambles that they could do nothing about it."

"Hiram Johnson, like the General before him was hounded out of office and the U.S. regained its equilibrium but the damage was done. Johnson was held up as a traitor for allowing the secession of California and had to flee

the country. The Californians welcomed him with open arms and his experience in government finally led him to become our Prime Minister. All of this because of hate over race."

The Kozars were greatly entertained by my story and spent the rest of the evening jocularly plotting to make a Kozar king of Bromfkidor.

After sleeping, I asked Halord Bishindi what the best way might be of reaching Tippilina. He informed me that that was in fact their destination and that I was welcome to join them for the journey, that is on the condition that I continue to tell them tall tales over supper.

The beauty of the land along the Molad was unsurpassed by anything I had ever seen save one which continually surfaced in my mind, that was the face of Ola Sharomna. I told myself that this woman was a political radical with whom I had nothing in common, and yet my heart told me otherwise. Here was born the most wondrous complication of my life, for there could be no doubt that I was in love with this Bromfkidoran beauty. I despaired of ever seeing her again for my duty led me ceaselessly toward the capital city while she was in the country pulling together her government in exile. To all appearances, our separation seemed permanent.

In this land at this time of year time's passage is not marked by intervals of light and darkness, but only by a procession of the low hanging sun through the points of the compass. This would be a good time for me to make note that the denizens of this land do not use the same cardinal points as are used in the rest of the world. The maps of this miniature world are made to orient by the position of the great mountain they call Bontor Sharmodna, which means "Ruling Mountain of the Land", but I will translate it simply as North Mountain. From its position all other points are derived, one opposite we can call South, those at right angles we will refer to as East and West. In this pocket-sized world this system works fairly well but it would of course quickly break down if extended to the rest of the globe.

The Bromfkidorans are aware of the spherical nature of the Earth but in the past they thought it much smaller than it is with the north pole somewhere in the outer waste. Because light impinges upon their land at such an acute angle they have come to the conclusion that the entire solar system is in fact quite a bit smaller than we know it to be. The sun only a few hundred miles away and quite small. One is led to believe that these folk would have been able to infer the existence of the outside world as their scientific knowledge improved even if we had not discovered them when we did. All it was wanting for them to do was to correctly measure one astronomical distance for their entire world view to come tumbling down like an arch having lost its keystone.

My journey afforded me much time for such musings as this, for my hosts were averse to conversation while on the road, preferring to save their talk for the dinner hour. I occupied my time with observations of the new world around me which provided me with no end of fascinating diversion as the great shaggy-feathered dray animals drove our caravan onward. Over my head with increasing frequency I saw skyships of a hundred different types and styles. This mob of air traffic could only mean that we had but little ground to cover before we would reach the center of the republic.

When first I saw the city, I was surprised that it did not lie directly on the river but rather on a mountain top nearby, "High Darmal", was the name I was told.

Upon that Mountain top was a city like that from an opium dream. Very tall buildings of graceful proportions though alien mode, flanked avenues that were made wide enough to allow the passage of even the greatest dreadnoughts of the sky in royal review. High peaks and summits of the vast stony mountain were bridged by steel arches even the most enraptured engineer would not dare to propose. High spindly spires served half a thousand arriving and departing skyships with their elevators swiftly riding up and down to the rhythm of this land's brisk commerce. Before even passing through the gates of this latter day Xanadu I could see in my mind's eye the splendidly dressed lords and ladies of the land promenading in its parks and courtyards, I could see its gay and free spirited children gambol and play in its fields and gardens. In my imagination, I smelled a thousand odors both good and bad which were the perfume of a great metropolis. Upon seeing it from afar, no force known could conceal my eagerness to cross the threshold of this city's gates! Here was truly the center of a world, this was Tippilina!

Chapter Seven

Tippilina

Having gotten this far, I was now faced with some important decisions. Should I just walk up to the first person of authority and explain who I was and how I got there? This could result in, among other things, the apprehension and imprisonment of the woman I love. Also I was in the company of Kozars, who are considered untrustworthy in the extreme by almost everyone. I considered the possibility of disguising myself as a gray man, but was very unsure of my ability to make the impersonation at all convincing. My companions persuaded me that this would in fact work, for no matter how imperfect my makeup may be, the majority of folk would have no expectation of my being anything else. All humans these persons had ever encountered, with the exception of the olive skinned Mosains and the heavy bearded Kozars were of the standard gray, beak-nosed type. They would have no expectation that I might be endeavoring to obscure a brown skinned, broad featured nature because they had simply never seen such a man in the first place. In this land I was unique. It is in this way that I came to enter this grand city dressed in what felt like a rather inept Halloween costume, complete with putty witch nose.

ed type. They would have no expectation that I might be endeavoring to obscure a brown skinned, broad featured nature because they had simply never seen such a man in the first place. In this land I was unique. It is in this way that I came to enter this grand city dressed in what felt like a rather inept Halloween costume, complete with putty witch nose.

I came up to the city gates by a large cable car with only Halord Bishindi as a companion playing the role of hired guide for a merchant from across

the republic. This benefited both of us for I was, in spite of my reading, still far too naive to get about on my own in this alien metropolis, and Halord, being thought a hireling of mine would be able to do business in places where Kozars were normally not allowed.

For a sum of fifty malat we were able to take rooms in an inn which catered to the needs of merchants and traveling workers. The window of my room commanded a view of the Palace of the Guides, the lower house of this nation's parliament. The Guidance Committee is made up of one representative from every local community in the land. The number of guides varies from year to year but is usually around twelve hundred members elected for three years each. The Guidance Committee elects from its own number the High Court Judges who implement the legislation of the Guides and the Senate.

At the other end of the avenue from the Palace of the Guides is the House of the King. This is the capitol building of this land. It is not only the home of the Bromfkidoran head of state but is also where the Senate or "King's Table" meets. Tomorrow I would go there and seek information concerning the rest of my diplomatic party.

After a breakfast of toasted lorva porridge and shallodzh egg, I asked Halord to go with me to the parliament. The wide avenue from the hotel was crowded with people of every station in life from the lowest beggar to members of the Senate. As we walked by the shops and office buildings, we saw a thousand transactions, and no doubt a swindle or two perpetrated.

From the corner of my eye I saw a familiar figure, and turning found it to be none other than Princess Ola Sharomna her self! Of course she did not recognize me in my gray makeup and false nose, but I could have little chance of missing her. Never have I seen so finely turned out a woman. Grand yet tasteful in fur and brilliant feathers, she turned the head of every man who passed near. Had I, up until now any doubts of my utter devotion to her, they were now put to rest. I knew now that her cause and my cause must somehow become one. I would find a way to both establish diplomatic relations with Bromfkidor and at the same time warn the world of the danger posed by the Great Principle! I knew then and only then could I sue for dear Ola's affections with any credibility. I had no idea of what she might be doing here but I surmised that her anti-government activities were not well known among society at the capital.

I could spend no more time gawking, I had to continue on my way to the Palace of the Guides. Having found out that Ola Sharomna was in the city, I would not fail to contact her later.

The parliamentary palace stood at the head of the avenue, a massive pile of pink and gray stone shaped like a great cube with a green copper dome at

each corner. The door was about thirty feet high and reached by a sinuous ramp from the street. We strode up the ramp and entered through the high doorway. Within was a large and noisy chamber and in that chamber were over a thousand men and all those thousand men were arguing with one another. I had once witnessed such a scene when visiting the Spanish Chamber of Deputies with the exception that there I saw only about one hundred men arguing at once. This was the most unholy din I had ever experienced. In these circumstances I had no idea how to proceed, but Halord knew how.

"Who represents Strum Kemlin?" he called out, "Who is Guide for that city, is he here?"

For a short moment I thought the man had lost his mind, for no one could hear his voice above the ongoing ferment which ruled this room. I was, however proven quite wrong as a voice from a nearby seat called back, "I do!"

Halord swiftly led me to him and spoke.

"Strum Kemlin is the city of my birth, I need the help of my representative."

The man looked him over.

"You are a Kozar."

"And you are not blind. Will you or will you not help me?"

"I am your Guide, and at your service."

"My companion needs to contact the Senate, he is one of the foreigners from beyond the Outer Waste."

"That is not possible they have returned to their lands."

This last piece of news sent a chill up my spine, I was now on my own in this land far from anything I knew. It now seemed to be my turn to speak. I removed my putty nose and turned to the Guide. He started at the sight.

"You have a flat brown nose!"

"My friend was correct, you aren't blind. You can now see that I am unlike the average man you might encounter in the street, perhaps that might lead you to the conclusion that we are not misrepresenting our selves."

"I believe that I could have misjudged the situation. Please forgive me."

He led us to a small office and shut the door behind us. He had no staff. On his desk sat a writing machine and a peculiar device which I learned was a sort of telephone. To my eye, at first, this machine of dark wood and polished brass resembled a phonograph more than it did a telephone. A long horn extended from the box which was the heart of the contrivance and on this box was a row of eight buttons, each of which was marked with a number. When the numbered buttons were struck in the order of a particular call code, it would activate another such unit in a different location without

the aid of an operator. The horn served as both microphone and loudspeaker and was sufficiently sensitive to allow the user to speak to it as he would to another person in the room. It was this device that he used to call down the street to the central office of the King's Table.

A half hour later found us being ushered into the chambers of the King's Table. The chamber was a small assembly hall with about fifty seats and desks for the senators and their staffs.

At the front of the room was a rectangular table with twenty-five seats, one for each of the three senators from each of the seven "Stomi", the former separate nations of Bromfkidor, and a seat for the king. Along the sides of the chamber were several tiers of offices joined by stairways. It was quite obvious that this was where the real business of government took place. The room seemed to be filled to only about half capacity, seven men engaged in discussion at the great table and ten others going about various tasks out in the main hall. I had removed my makeup so that when I entered all eyes turned to me.

The first man to rise from the table was on the short side for a gray man at about six foot even, he was on the fat side for anyone. He approached us with a friendly expression on his face.

"You must be the one who disappeared, Fodro Hamod."

"Woodrow Hammond, and I was abducted at Szojana."

"My name is Mijrim Berol, senior Senator from Keld. You speak much better than the other foreigners ever were able to."

"I learned the language in circumstances of necessity, mine has been an eventful odyssey."

"Partner Hammond, you must be brought up to date on events of the last four months."

"Four months!" Without the regularity of sunrises and sunsets I had lost all concept of time, to me it had felt like no more than three or four weeks! And there was that word again, "partner" that they use to address one another. All "partners" in uniting the world. In my head I always translated it into the more friendly sounding Californian "pardner" that is still heard frequently in my native land. This, I'm afraid, was self deception.

"Yes, for one thing you are believed dead by your government. For another, I'm sorry to report that not much was accomplished diplomatically by your mission."

Another major blow. "What next?"

"We will transport you back across the Outer Waste to Palmiroj where you can make contact with your people. The official policy of the King's Table is that you are no longer welcome here in this land."

As I was being told this I spied someone who I never expected to be glad to see, Dzhonith Shopari. He spotted me immediately and called out my name. Berol looked shocked.

"Shopari, what are you doing here? How do you know this man?"

Shopari realized that he had made an error in recognizing me but forged ahead anyway.

"I was at Szojana when his party was brought through."

"So was I." said a new voice. I recognized the newcomer as none other than lieutenant Dzhidro Alprendauro.

"Dzhidro! What are you doing here?" I cried.

"Bontor Do'alina visits the capital city many times a year, word that you were here reached me and I came. It is good to see you alive. I have news that you will find interesting." Unfortunately we could exchange no more words.

I was actually relieved that he didn't recognize Shopari as the one who knocked him out at Szojana. There was a chance that I could salvage some control of the situation being the only one present who knew that Shopari was part of an anti-government conspiracy.

Before any more conversation could take place, Berol informed me that I would be returned to my hotel pending my return.

Shopari offered to accompany me and I assented. On the way out with Halord and myself he drew me close and whispered, "Ola Sharomna would like to speak with you." I merely nodded.

"She will be at your rooms tonight."

There were no more words between us until he left me at the door when he said, "You can still help us."

I determined that that is exactly what I must do.

Chapter Eight

My Princess, my cause

That night in my room I brooded over my impending expulsion from the country and tried to figure out some way to avoid it.

Nothing came to mind and I was becoming overwhelmed with a sense of helplessness. Before I was able to fall too deeply into despair there was a knock on the door. Opening it, I saw the face of my one true love, Princess Ola Sharomna of Pojona.

Was it possible that I saw my own yearnings mirrored in her features? I dared not hope! She just slightly stammered as she first spoke.

"I...I'm happy that I had another opportunity to see you."

"And I, you my Princess."

She looked both startled and pleased to hear me call her that.

She colored a little and glanced toward the floor, then continued.

"You have seen how disorganized the Guidance Committee is. You have seen how little the King's Table cares for diplomacy resulting in the failure of your nation's mission here. Further, you have been made to understand the threat that the current system poses to your lands. When you 'escaped' from us, I am sure you now know, you lost any chance to have the basic aims of your assignment here realized. You now have a second chance."

"A second chance? What might that be?"

"His Majesty, Meskrin D'Rohuki King of the republic of Bromfkidor, had requested to meet with the representatives from the outer world. He had done so too late, for his order came a few hours after the delegation had been expelled. You could meet with him."

"Ola, "I explained, "I am not the ambassador of my government."

"Do you deny," she demanded, "that you are the most senior member of your party in the country?"

"No I do not, but I am not empowered to make any commitments."

"All you need to do is gain the king's interest and he will invite back your negotiating committee over the wishes of the Senate."

I swallowed hard before I replied.

"My Princess, anything that I can do for you or your cause....

MY cause, is yours."

Again she blushed.

"Mister Hammond,"

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"Woodrow."

"Woodrow, the degree of your commitment, your ardent commitment..." she faltered.

"My commitment is to you, wholly and utterly."

The next second found her in my arms bestowing upon me a kiss whose meaning was unmistakable. In my life, I have done things which some people have called brave, but none of those required of me more courage than bespeaking my love for Ola Sharomna. I have never regretted that moment for even an instant but I should never wish to relive it.

The only business we could speak any more of that evening was what time I would be called upon to have audience with the king upon the morrow. Afterward we parted to ponder separately the events of the last few moments.

After waking and taking a meal, I once more headed up the avenue called "Darwa Odoir" to the "House of the King". This time, however, I came without Halord Bishindi at my side. My companions this day were Ola Sharomna and Dzhonith Shopari. We were all dressed in ceremonial attire appropriate to our respective stations, in my case that of full ambassador which I donned only under protest. My costume included a cape of a thousand multi-colored feathers which is worn by a major domo of the house of Sharomna of Pojona, a title which had just been conferred upon me mere moments before that my presence might carry more weight.

The reception hall of the king of Bromfkidor is possibly one of the most imposing rooms I have ever been in. Every aspect of its design is calculated to instill in those who come before the king formally a sense of the power and responsibility of his station. In this room one is small and Bromfkidor great and the king is Bromfkidor. Along the sides of the great throne room are columns which rise a full fifty feet to the deeply arched ceiling. The walls are adorned with portraits of the great figures of this country's history. At the far end of the hall from the entrance is a huge granite statue of

Dzhidro Bogadnij, father of this Antarctic empire. Also to be seen is an enormous flag. Between the statue and the flag is the throne.

On this day, that throne was occupied by a thin old man who looked tired and unwell. In spite of his obvious age, his eyes belied an awareness that few men have enjoyed. Old and frail though he was, there could be no doubt that this man was the active sovereign of a great nation. When he spoke, there was not the

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slightest hesitation or lack of sureness in his voice.

This man was not a hereditary monarch as in England or California but an elected official who holds office for life. At the time of Bogadnij's death, Meskrin D'Rohuki was the senior Senator from Mekhrandur. As provided for in the laws of this country when a king must be replaced, a new one was elected by the Senate from its own number. This was the second man so elevated in this nation's history. He looked directly at me.

"Ambassador Hammond, I welcome you into my presence. It is unfortunate that, I am led to understand, welcome has not been extended to you by any other branch of my government."

"Your Majesty is most gracious, but I must say that I am very concerned at the treatment of the others of my delegation."

"I was with Bogadnij when the Great Principle was conceived. It was a different world then, Not one of us ever dreamed that there might be a whole world beyond the Outer Waste. How could we know. It was Shopari here who brought first into my presence the explorer Arnesen, the man from outside the world. He was so exotic, this pale skinned pigmy. You are not of the same race as him."

"No, your Majesty, men of my type originated on a different continent. A land called Africa more than six times the size of Bromfkidor. People of Arnesen's type had their genesis in a land called Europe. Most of the people in the world look like neither him or me. These folk come out of a huge land called Asia.

"All of these peoples make up the world outside Bromfkidor, a world of riches, knowledge and wonders. Yours is but one country amongst many, those of your people who think that more profit is to be made by trying to incorporate us under your government rather than deal with us as equals are misleading you."

Our conversation continued in that vein for some time with Shopari interjecting here and there to apprise the king or I of some specific of the situation. I left the palace that day feeling for the first time since my abduction that something was being accomplished.

Dining a few hours later with Halord Bishindi, we heard horns from the Palace up the street which were soon echoed from the Palace of the Guides. Soon we were hearing low lamenting brass music from every public building in the city. Halord looked worried and glanced at me with wide eyes.

"Woodrow Hammond, this can mean nothing good! The horns blow from the towers of Tippilina only on occasions of national

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mourning."

almost at that very moment there was a knock on the door.

Answering the door, I found Lenar Kohain, the accomplice of Shopari in my abduction.

"Partner Hammond," he said, "The king has died! The Senate meets as we speak, there can be no doubt that they shall elevate Buerno Montolla to the throne. He has all ready said that you cannot be allowed to leave Bromfkidor! You must leave the city at once. Shopari and Princess Ola Sharomna have been detained and shall probably be thrown in prison the moment that Montolla is king! The constables of the King's Table are coming to detain you right now!"

This was the most shocking news that I could have possibly heard. I ran to the window and saw a detachment of the Palace Police marching up Darwa Odoir toward the hotel. I turned to Kohain and Bishindi.

"You two must detain them," the street fighter in me was coming to the fore, "I will go and free the Princess and Shopari."

And with that, I stepped out of the window onto the ledge outside just at the moment that I first heard the footsteps of the constables ascending the stairs. I let myself down onto a lower portion of the roof of the hotel and ran for the side.

The edge of the roof was separated from that of the next building by about fifteen feet. The only reason that I was able to make the jump was the sure knowledge that I must or have no chance of saving my true love from life in prison.

I had to keep moving for shots were coming from the window of my former dwelling. It was only a matter of seconds before one would surely find its mark. Left with no choice I dove from the roof and prayed to whatever god would listen. My fall was broken by a cart full of vegetables which spilled upon the street and sidewalk far and wide. I leapt to my feet and ran down a side street dodging into an alley where I found a small shed.

I hid myself in it to gain some time to think.

→

Chapter Nine

Fugitive once more

I crouched in the tiny foul smelling shed panting and gripping my ankle which I had landed on wrong when I hit the vegetable cart. Because of this it took me a few seconds to realize that I was hearing a sound beside my own heavy breathing. That sound was a low growl within mere inches of my ear. Bursting from the shed, I was pursued by a voracious avisaur which seemed to embody all of the most unpleasant aspects of a pit bull combined with twice the size and half the intelligence. The vicious creature had torn most of my clothes and some of my skin before I was able to scramble over a nearby fence. I can only assume that the animal was kept by someone as a watch dog, a task for which it was not entirely unsuited.

I could not have imagined being in a less advantageous position. I was alone without help in a strange land where I had no hope of blending in. My only allies were in jail, I knew not where, and the police were inclined to shoot first and ask questions later. The highest item on my agenda had to be obtaining the freedom of Ola Sharomna, but to do that I had to find someone who would give me directions to where she was detained without alerting the authorities. I was having a hard time imagining why anyone would help me when the penalty for doing so would, no doubt, be quite severe.

I'm not sure how much time I spent skulking through the alleys of Tippilina before I found the city prison. All my knowledge was gleaned from overhearing conversations from the shadows and from discarded news sheets. The prison was at the far side of town, below the city at the edge of a precipice. There was only one entrance to the building at the front, all other sides gave way to a drop of over twelve hundred feet into the Darwa river. Getting in and out of here would be something of a challenge. Around the time I figured this out nature favored me with a phenomena that I had almost forgotten about, sunset.

With the fall of night there was reason to believe that I could at least move around without attracting too much attention because of my face. The front of the prison was guarded by armed constables but there was no actual

barricade on the doors. Except for the armed guards it looked like any other public edifice.

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Presumably the authorities thought that the jail's precarious location provided security enough.

The guards were separated from one another by a dividing wall near the gate for only a few seconds at one point of their patrol. This was the only time I would be able to surprise one without alerting the other. I punched the man hard in the back of the head and he went down silently. In spite of the fact that it would be but little in the way of disguise, I took the man's clothing as well as his weapon to replace that which had been shredded by the "watchdog".

I walked patrol with the other constable until I could figure out what my next step would be. As soon as I entered the building I would be recognized on sight, therefore I would have to know precisely where I needed to go when I got in. When I passed the wall again I slapped awake the guard whom I had previously rendered inert.

Holding the gun directly under his pointed beak of a nose I whispered, "Where is Ola Sharomna? Tell me or die!"

I was amazed, there was not even a second's hesitation.

"First cell, level two."

I hit him again putting him out and ran for the door.

My entry of the building was surprisingly easy as I was completely unexpected and the guards inside the door merely gawked at me as I ran by. I dashed up the stairs as quickly as I could. The stairway was a narrow enclosed spiral so I was unable to see more than a few feet either ahead or behind although I heard frantic feet directly on my heels. I reached the top and turned around just in time to see a guard emerge from the top of the stairs. He raised his weapon to shoot me and I by reflex raised mine and shot him dead.

Never in my life had I taken the life of another man, it put a chill deep down in my soul. I reached over and took his gun and warned back the other followers. I called out Ola Sharomna's name and was gratified to hear her respond. Her cell was only a few steps away. It was obvious that those who conceived this prison figured that its impenetrable location was security enough for the "cells" were mere rooms with quite ordinary locks on the doors. A shot from my gun freed the princess and she informed me that Shopari was in a neighboring cell. In short order he was free and armed with the dead guard's gun. Due to the narrowness of the staircase, we found it easy to defend our position although it took four more

bodies blocking it to convince the guards of that fact.

So, we had established a defensible position but we had nowhere we could go. I turned and called to Ola.

"Do the cells have windows?"

"What?" she screamed, "Are you mad? A death drop is outside those walls, do you expect to fly away like a farnoud?"

"Faith, my princess, have faith. While I yet draw breath there is still hope."

While Shopari held a gun on the stairway, I ran into a cell and peered out the window. To my joy I saw exactly what I expected to see, a police skyship approaching the prison from below the cliff where they might hope to be unobserved. They were doing precisely what I would do in this type of situation if I were on the other side of it, keeping us occupied at the top of the stairs while they stormed in through the windows. If luck would only smile on me in the next few heart beats, my antagonists could be second guessed. There could be no hesitation, I tore open the window, jumped through and was instantly plummeting toward either a slim chance for salvation or certain doom, broken and dead in the icy waters of the Darwa.

The police skyship grew larger as I plunged toward it and I seemed to be right on target so I folded into a crouch to prepare for the impact. I struck the gas filled envelope hard enough to have the wind knocked from me and, dazed, I started to slide toward the edge and oblivion. I regained my senses just as I slid off the top of the ship. For a split second it seemed that all was lost when I spied one of the docking lines trailing below the gondola. I reached, prayed and felt the rope between my fingers as I tightened my grip. I was now swinging along a wide arc which would bring me, with a little luck, to the bridge of the small skyship.

Would that I could have had a photograph of the expression worn by the pilot of that craft as he first saw me swinging up from beneath him. More impressive still was his look of stark horror as I crashed through the glass and directly into him sending him flying from the aircraft to his life's bitter conclusion.

holding my gun at ready, I scanned the control cabin for any others but saw no one else. I heard from the level below me sounds made by the armed men who were making ready to enter the jail. There were most likely more of them than I would be able to deal with single handedly and they were no doubt heavily armed. Quickly, I looked over the controls to see if any options presented themselves. The ship was still rising toward the window, I had to

think fast!

Leaning out the broken wind screen I called to Ola and Shopari.

"Princess! Come to the window I have a way out!"

As her beautiful face emerged into the darkness, she was all ready berating me.

"Woodrow, you idiot! You could have been killed! Never leave my side again, ever!"

Her words warmed my heart even as she scolded me, for there could be no doubt that these harsh words were an expression of love. I felt I could spare a second for just one wry comment.

"I love you also, my princess."

I had come level with the window and urged her into the ship.

She wasted no time. I called for Shopari, he heard me and turned to make the final dash for freedom. He was within arms reach when his head exploded like a wet melon, spattering me with at least a quart of blood and gore. As his remains slumped to the floor, I saw the gunman behind him and I raised my weapon to fire a projectile directly through his heart.

As I pulled the ship away from the wall of the prison, I realized that I must now devote some thought to what was to become of the men on the level below. To my shock, that problem was solved by Ola Sharomna when she pulled a lever releasing the auxiliary passenger compartment into the cascading waters hundreds of feet below. The sudden reduction in our weight caused the ship to rise with alarming speed into a thick bank of clouds.

"How did you know to do that?" I demanded.

"These police ships are made for only four or five men. When they are used, for instance, to board a pirate vessel, they must be equipped with an extra compartment to carry the number of constables required. That compartment is removable, I removed it."

This lovely girl had in her the heart of a warrior and nerves of steel, I only hoped that I could prove my self deserving of her love.

Taking the ship through a sharp banking turn, I headed us down the Molad river away from the city.→

Chapter Ten To the Outer Waste

The park like landscape of the Molad Valley unfolded before us as the little ship coursed through the sky. I was at a loss regarding how to proceed. We were headed in the general direction of Nomchit Sharomna where Ola thought we might be able to obtain supplies, but I had my doubts. There was every reason to believe that a faster ship than ours had been dispatched to head us off. With Montolla's rise to power my ability to simply survive in this country was virtually nonexistent. Below us on the seemingly placid earth, I could feel in my bones forces were gathering to insure that I didn't make it home.

It was perfectly clear to me that we must obtain a ship with a much longer range. With such a conveyance, we could cross the Outer Waste and the sea into South America. We determined to possess ourselves of such a craft although it seemed that this would necessitate a bold act of air piracy. After much discussion we agreed that our best chance was at the outpost town of Berszantoj at the edge of the Outer Waste nearest to Palmeroj. This was a major naval station for exploration and was now being expanded for its new task as a base for conquest of the South American continent.

When Nomchit Sharomna appeared on the horizon we knew that supplies would not be had there, for over the great house hung a huge military skyship. Taking our bearings, we veered off from the neighborhood of the estate to make our way toward

Berszantoj.

Finally I found time to reflect on the events of the last two days. The astonishing discovery that my diplomatic party had been expelled from the country. My encounter, once again, with my friend Dzhidro Alprendauro who had rushed to see me at the King's Table, but never had a chance to tell me what it was he had to say to me. My seemingly successful audience with the king, rendered pointless by his sudden death. My forced flight from Tippilina and the bloody jail break culminating in the gruesome demise of Dzhonith Shopari and my theft of a police vehicle. And now we were about to attempt an act of outright piracy against a nation which, originally I was to aid in establishing peaceful

relations with.

The peculiar thing was that never at any point did I doubt that I was taking the correct actions, but never did I anticipate that this would be the situation where I would eventually arrive.

I looked down at the Bromfkidoran police uniform that I now wore and compared it in my mind to the jacket and tie which was my normal attire, and was almost moved to laughter. I, a mere secretary, was now the "Black Pirate" of the skies of a lost civilization! What a awful situation! Could there ever be a life for me back in my homeland? would I be an embarrassment to the diplomatic service and my Emperor? And what if the authorities of this land took me into custody? In that case, the chance of my ever seeing California again was slim indeed. On the other hand, what an uncommon adventure! What man before me could say that he had ever experienced so rare an enterprise? The savage street warrior of my youth had come to dominance in my personality and somehow I was now more fully alive than I had been in years! By this realization I felt that I had taken control of events which had previously seemed out of my control. Now, the mission which lay ahead of me filled me not with a stomach churning dread, but with an odd grim excitement.

Below, I saw herds of giant avisauras browsing on shrubs and trees along the wide flood plain of the Molad. Unlike rivers in the outer world which flow into the open sea, the Molad flows toward the Outer Waste where it becomes a network of glaciers after passing through spaces between the mountains that border the temperate zone which is Bromfkidor. This land was one of unspoiled beauty and much of it had gone back to nature in the years since air transport had replaced commerce by highway. The roads which formerly crisscrossed the land were now represented mostly by cuts through the trees which resembled firebreaks. In more open land there was no evidence of habitation except for tiny ghost towns which were once stops in the wilderness for travelers.

We set down at one of these little ruins to scavenge for supplies. Bromfkidoran skyships are not made to actually alight on the earth, but rather to be moored to a mast. In this abandoned, pre-flight village we had to make do with a grain storage tower which was infested with tiny rat-like avisauras.

I soon discovered that, for all her courage, Ola Sharomna carried with her a distinct animus for these creatures. Not only was I entirely unable to impress on her the irony of this, but I found that

she had absolutely no sense of humor regarding this peculiar phobia. In fact, our discussion of this led to her refusing to speak to me for over an hour.

The small collection of buildings had been gone over with great thoroughness by previous scavengers but we were still able to find some paraffin to fuel our engines. There was no food to be found in the town itself but opportunity for hunting was ample so we would not go hungry.

I had not forgotten what sort of hazards await the unwary in the wilds of Bromfkidor, and thus was on my guard for what ever the countryside had to offer. We were in the stoma of Mekhrandur which was noted for the dangerous beasts that roam its precincts. Ola warned me that the creature I encountered on her estate, while rare in Pojona, was damnably ubiquitous hereabouts. I had bagged two maredij and was heading back to our docking site when I heard a peculiar call in the distance, a low hoot, like that one might imagine coming from an owl that weighed a ton or two.

My earlier experience had educated me to a course of caution regarding the local wildlife, therefore I found it prudent to stand still and listen carefully. The hoot in the distance was answered by another from much closer. Then from an altogether different direction came a third. In a few scant seconds the sounds surrounded me and I was becoming concerned for my safety.

It was then that I saw the first of them passing among the trees to my left, seemingly without even seeing me. A similar beast passed me on the other side only a bit farther away. The creatures were about the size of an African rhinoceros but with a much larger head studded with several horns of various sizes. Their bodies were free of hair or feathers but like their other avisaurian brethren, they still had at least one birdlike characteristic, in this case a parrot-like beak.

In a short time I was seeing these animals passing near and far from me on all sides, all ignoring me in an almost insulting manner. Some even jostled me as they passed evincing neither fear nor interest. It was now clear to me that I was not part of the diet of these creatures. They were vegetarians filling the same natural role here as did cattle in my country. Perhaps they were raised for meat, on this trip I never found out. The creatures left a wake of crushed foliage, trampled grass and dung. It took almost an hour and a half for the entire herd to pass me by and allow me to go my way.

In a few days we had loaded the ship for the journey and battle

ahead. We had cut and smoked our game and stored enough water for drinking, ballast and to be electrolyzed for hydrogen to provide lift to our ship. Our brief sojourn in this peaceful spot had come to an end. The responsibilities we had set for ourselves called to us and we were compelled to go.

Dreamlike, the stolen skyship drifted away from the decaying roadhouse toward the north and the outpost city. A day after we set out, the mountains at the end of the river appeared on the horizon. The Molad delta drained onto a sodden tundra in a thousand tiny rivulets. Bare lichen crusted rock protruded through the mud and frost here and there to be nibbled on by furtive looking, shaggy white feathered avisaur. These goat sized creatures hopped about in the seemingly aimless fashion

of those who must eat anything at all and must do so constantly in order to live. This was a bland and depressing land in which no one would live voluntarily.

Beyond those mountains lay the Outer Waste, the vast icy, desert through which I first entered Bromfkidor. Through a valley dividing those forbidding peaks flowed the remains of the Molad as it congealed into a glacier. It was through there, we also, would pass to a rendezvous with fate or fortune, we knew not which.→

The Pirates of the Outer Waste

Berszantoj lay just beyond the valley of the Molad on a high peak which had been leveled to accommodate masts for at least fifty of the biggest ships in the Bromfkidoran navy at one time and allow safe room to maneuver for all of them. This was a city which covered as much ground, albeit more sparsely, as Tippilina itself. The city's water mine had denuded the landscape for at least twenty square miles around the mountain. In all of Bromfkidor, this was the first place that I had seen where the land appeared to have been overused to the point of being laid waste. Had I not known that the country was building up for war, I would have been confused by the flagrant waste of resources. The vast amounts of water were being used to create hydrogen to lift a thousand skyships on missions of conquest and subjugation. Skyships had, for the most part been lifted by helium produced in factories that froze it out of the air, but this process is too expensive for use in ships of battle, many of which will be lost.

The day we topped the horizon we saw about fifteen ships moored above the city. It didn't take me long to identify the ship which would be our target, the Borodna Kora, a military

corvette. These little ships had a fantastic range, and here near the edge of the continent I was sure that this one could cross the ocean to South America.

In order to approach the city we would have to signal our intentions. In 1903, wireless was yet uncommon in the outer world and entirely unknown in Bromfkidor. Signaling between skyships of this lost republic was accomplished by use of an elaborate semaphore array of lights and colored panels which could be alternately hidden and revealed. These arrays are capable of conveying messages of great complexity in the hands of a competent operator, a description which fit neither Ola nor myself.

Hanging back, we consulted manuals on board to compose a clear and concise identification for ourselves which would be accepted without suspicion by the authorities of Berszantoj. Thankfully the apparatus had an automatic repeater so we were able to slowly put together our message and play it back at a speed

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which would not incite inquiry.

Feeding fuel to the engine, I moved toward the city's traffic control building which stood at the summit of a hill nearby. From the tower top flashed a signal requesting identification. We returned with our prepared response. They now thought we were a police craft which had gotten lost

and was in need of repairs and fuel, a story consistent with our appearance. We were directed to a mast across the dockyard from the ship which was our target. At the same time, two other police craft approached the same point to rendezvous with what they thought was a comrade in distress. I admit that this deception gave me no pleasure and had I another alternative than an openly criminal act, I would have used it. The government of this nation had attempted to forcibly imprison a foreign national, myself, and I had to do anything to preserve my freedom. In my heart, I believed that the freedom of every human being on the Earth was at stake.

The semaphore which came from one of the ships that neared indicated that they were not regular police but representatives of the republic, and I thought at that point that we had lost before we had even gone to battle. The closer ship extended a walkway to our hatch and a man walked across to enter the ship. I picked up my weapon.

The door opened and a man in a military uniform stepped aboard and turned toward the princess and myself.

"May I have permission to come aboard?"

The man was Dzhidro Alprendauro, lieutenant of the sky navy of Bromfkidor.

"Dzhidro!" The name was spoken in chorus by Ola Sharomna and myself. Astonished, I turned to her.

"You know this man? How?"

"He is a Pojojan loyalist. He has sworn allegiance to the house of Sharomna and the nation of Pojona."

"And we are all", said Dzhidro, "loyal also to a united Bromfkidor. You must not think that we aim to destroy the peace that was given to us by Dzhidro Bogadnij. On the contrary it is our wish to stop the war which the new government will surely bring with it."

This is why he showed up at the King's Table to bring me this message. Evidently, Dzhonith Shopari told him that I was to be there when he got word that I had appeared at the Palace of the Guides. From the start the two of them had been in cahoots. Ola

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Sharomna had never told me because she had not known that Shopari had called upon him for assistance in my abduction by making sure that I would be in a certain place at a certain time.

To discover that I had been a pawn from the start would have been a more bitter pill to swallow but for two things. One was that I genuinely embraced the heart of this cause and the other was that Ola Sharomna, my Princess had not been one of the people behind the deception. Her role was

only that of spiritual center of a movement, it was Shopari who targeted me personally as a useful thread in his web of intrigue.

Alprendauro spoke to the Princess.

"Have you selected a ship?"

"Borodna Kora."

"A good choice. We can arrange to have the ship mostly unmanned within a few hours."

My relief was a tangible, nay huge, weight removed from my shoulders. The thought of having to go in shooting and kill more men whose only crime was doing their duty was repugnant to me and I had racked my brain to find a way to avoid it. And when it had come down to the wire, I found help from one whom I didn't even know was an ally.

We did not have a great deal of time, the police ships had been sent to evaluate our condition and would have to report soon. Alprendauro figured that we had about an hour before we would be required to take action and at that time our movements must be decisive.

"Borodna Kora", said the lieutenant, "is sending all but a few station keeping officers on shore leave. It is standard procedure for a civic control ship to fly by periodically and see that all is secure. I will transfer you both to my ship and take you with us when we visit Borodna Kora. When the ship is taken, all of us become criminals. I and the crew of one of the police ships have volunteered to leave the country with you. It seems that part of the work of reclaiming our nation must be done from the outside."

Again, I was taken aback.

"Dzhidro, this means giving up everything that you know for the great unknown of the outside world. And you, my Princess, your life...."

"Is inextricably entwined with yours, you go nowhere without me. Woodrow, we must all go with you to Kala Forna, we must show your people the danger they face!"

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"California." I corrected, "All of you will be welcome in my country, I'm sure. But first we must get there. Lieutenant Alprendauro, please take us to Borodna Kora."

Ola and I were dressed in uniforms of the Bromfkidoran sky navy so we would draw no attention when crossing the walkway to the police ship, for at that time we would be visible to observers on the ground. We were hurried into the other ship where we were greeted formally as the crown Princess and, as I had almost forgotten, a Major Domo of the house of Sharomna.

In truth I hoped in the near future to upgrade my title to that of Prince Consort.

The trip to Borodna Kora took but a few minutes and we signaled our wish to send a man aboard to see that nothing was amiss. This was not quite a standard procedure and the other ship inquired as to why. To my great surprise, the captain of our vessel gave "Looking for the outlaw, Hammond" as the reason.

They opened the door and admitted two of our men. I insisted that I take part in this portion of the operation. I reasoned that I must share in the risk that was being taken for my own salvation, so the second pair to board the ship were Dzhidro and myself. Running across the walkway we entered close upon the heels of the first pair of officers who were now creating confusion by searching the main cabin from top to bottom strewing the contents of lockers and pantries every where. The skeleton crew looked on in confusion. While their attention was diverted, we came aboard with weapons drawn. Looking into my brown face, the crew members realized that they had lost the fight before it had begun, for Dzhidro and I stood there with guns leveled at them and they had no arms in reach. We now had to move very quickly in order not to arouse suspicion before we were underway. The bound crewmen were marched across to the other ship and made as comfortable as possible. The police ship with them aboard

would be left moored to the mast when we left. In a short time the other police ship would come to investigate. by that time we would be far, far out over the Outer Waste and unlikely to be pursued.

Gunning our engines, we pulled about and unhitched from the mast. Within a few short minutes, Berszantoj was several miles to our stern while traffic control signaled frantically to us and then to the police vessel to find out what the matter was.

We were congratulating our selves on the neatness of our escape when one of the ship's officers reported to the captain. The captain, his name was Rijin Moranda, announced.

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"Lieutenant, I doubt that you will find much pleasure in the view behind."

Dzhidro, Ola and myself rushed to the rear of the cabin and looked out the window. A few miles behind us was one of the great lenticular dreadnoughts of the type which first brought me into Bromfkidor.

"The Dori'alina!" cried Dzhidro, "This is trouble, it is one of the few ships which can out run us and without question, out gun us."

As if on cue, the gigantic vessel discharged a shell in our direction, but as yet they were too far to inflict any damage upon us. They were putting on speed now and soon they would shorten that distance to such that they could not miss.

"Speed captain!" Called Dzhidro, "We must have speed!"

The captain was in great distress for he could see no way that we could either fight or run. None of us had considered the possibility that they would devote such power to the chase of one man. The captain turned the ship about and signaled to the Dori'alina.

"What is your mission? We are retreating into the Outer Waste, never to return. Waste no more time in our pursuit."

Dori'alina replied,

"We cannot do that. For better or worse, Buerno Montolla, King of the Republic of Bromfkidor has decreed that the foreigner

Woodrow Hammond may not leave the country. No force used to prevent his leaving will be deemed too great."

In the years which have followed, I have always felt that this response was a tactical error. Why would anyone stop and surrender when one knew that one's freedom would be permanently restricted. In fact I had no assurance that my life would not have been forfeit were I to turn and give myself up peacefully.

I could see in the eyes of all on board that, had there been any weakness of resolve in their hearts, it had now evaporated.

Captain Moranda brought round the ship in a wide banking arc as once more Dori'alina fired, but this time hitting only the piece of sky we once occupied. We now had a view from above the gigantic ship and saw upon its upper deck crewmen rushing to man battle stations. While we could not match the speed of the monstrous vessel, we were much more maneuverable.

"We will be able to evade their guns for a short time only, this type of ship signs aboard the best available gunnery crews.

They will soon learn our patterns and shoot us down, make no

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mistake." Thus spoke the captain.

"Have they any weak spots?" I asked.

"The dreadnought class ships are not generally armed with a heavy arsenal, but they are nigh invulnerable. We have no choice, we must escape for we cannot hope to bring them down."

Our situation appeared to be hopeless. We dodged and ran for mile after relentless mile as Dori'alina dogged our heels, growing closer as time wore on.

It was then that inspiration found me.

Before us now lay the mountains at the base of the Palmer peninsula. Our superior maneuverability could finally be put to use here where it was useless over the open plains. I urged the captain to fly in as close among the

craggs and summits of the wind tortured rock as he dared. Dori'alina, seeing what we had in mind, fired upon us with renewed force and finally landed a shot which disabled one of our elevator fins. She was close upon us now and we were diving toward the earth with alarming speed. Being the only man on aboard with no assigned post, I jumped through a hatch onto the upper deck amidst the freezing winds of the Antarctic mountains.

The mighty wind did its best to throw me from the deck of the hurtling aircraft but I managed to find just enough in the way of some meager hand hold for each tortuous inch toward the damaged fin. I could see that all that would be required for a temporary repair would be to bind a broken piece of wood back into place from where it now hung free. I accomplished this with a lacing borrowed from my coat.

"Pull up!" I shouted to the captain, "Pull up, I have fixed the flap!"

Hanging on for my life, I found a second to look up. A mere hundred yards behind us was the leviathan dirigible bearing down upon us like a cat upon a beetle. I could see on its upper deck the gun crews making ready the final, deadly assault. Then, my eyes beheld the repaired flap moving to push aside the wind and drive our ship upward on a sharp ascent. My nails tore into the outer skin of our aircraft as the harsh, icy gale tried to claim me for its own.

The Dori'alina, attempting to duplicate our motion, brought its balance mast into sharp contact with the mountain side breaking it free of the rest of the ship with a loud report.

The mast, now swinging free attached only by a few guy lines caused the ship to pitch and roll drunkenly.

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As our acceleration abated somewhat I made my way back to the entry hatch and thence to the safety of the ship's cabin.

We came over the mountains into Palmiroj still pursued by the now unstable Dori'alina. We signaled to them to go home lest they become marooned in this desolate region, for there was no possibility of their catching us now.

Their reply came in the form of a shot which destroyed one of our engines and exploded a small fuel tank, before they crashed into the barren earth and exploded into flames.→

Chapter Twelve
Patagonia and California

I have tried to visualize how it must have seemed to those lonely gauchos that night out on the pampas. The Southern Cross burned above their heads with the cold light of night as they huddled around the campfire strumming guitars and singing sad songs of lost love.

One of them points toward a new light in the sky and calls to his companions, "Que es?"

In the sky is a burning apparition which soars over the hills leaving a smoking trail. No time is wasted, the cattlemen mount up and gallop for the place where the fire from the sky came down.

Our crippled ship had limped across the straits of Magellan to the South American continent on one engine. With a huge section missing from the hull leaving us exposed to the elements,

we had had to close off a large portion of the cabin so as not to freeze to death. The remains of the engine were still in flames as we crossed into southern Patagonia and finally started to head in.

Our landing, while not fatal to anyone on board, was a rough and tumble affair. I was the first to step out onto the dew wet pampa. The first thing I saw was a man on horseback and I was startled. How long it had been since I had seen a mammal!

Others emerged from the ship and the horseman stared in wonder at the gray giants who now stood before him and at the alien beauty of Ola Sharomna!

"I must be taken at once to see the Californian consulate,"

I said in Spanish, "no time can be wasted. I assure you that this is a matter of the very greatest urgency."

The gaucho gave a bemused smile, then a gap toothed grin, "Senor, there could never have been any doubt that a man who falls from the sky with companions such as these could have done so on anything but the most urgent business!" He then burst out in laughter, much to the confusion of the Bromfkidorans.

From the town of Bahia Grande I wired the consulate who immediately booked train passage for my companions and I to Buenos Aires. From there we traveled by ship north to the Caribbean Sea and through the Nicaragua Canal. Finally after a journey of twenty-seven days we entered San Francisco bay.

At the dock we were greeted by William Richardson, who

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informed me that I had been presumed dead until the consulate wired his office. I introduced him to Ola Sharomna, captain Moranda, lieutenant Alprendauro and the others.

As I related an account of my adventures, Mister Richardson looked more and more dismayed at the turn events in Bromfkidor had taken. He assured me that he was going to go directly to Parliament and the Emperor.

Mister Richardson said, "When you were kidnapped, we were unable to get a straight answer from any officials regarding your fate. Upon our arrival at Tippiлина, we were received coolly by the King's Table. They delayed and delayed any hard decision about diplomatic relations. They kept on creating new conditions for us before we could have an audience with the king. Finally we were asked to leave without any explanation. They were polite

enough, mind you, but they would not even discuss the reasons for rejecting diplomatic contact."

"Mister Richardson," I said, "I'm afraid that you cannot begin to understand how much more than mere rejection of diplomatic relations is involved here. As far as Bromfkidor's government is concerned, we are already part of the republic."

Needless to say there was much more discussion with both Mister Richardson and with other government officials over the next few weeks. This culminated in the address to parliament by Ola Sharomna do Hammond jasz Stomo Nomchitka do Bromfkidoro do Pojona, my new bride. My wife made an impassioned appeal for the recognition of Bromfkidor only on the condition that they recognize other governments.

"Any relationship," she said, "whether between nations or between individuals, must have a component of recognition of each participants fundamental identity and need for expression of those things which make the individual or community of individuals unique. In my country, we saw the horrors of war, how it destroyed every thing we knew, ruined the lives of everyone we loved, and were unable to imagine anything worse. I fault us for lack of imagination, for to be alone in a wide and varied world is far, far worse. If the present government of Bromfkidor has its way, the entire globe will be reduced to naught more than an anthill. Please understand that my country is not a totalitarian dictatorship. Our people walk as free men who forge their own destinies and build their own lives, they vote for their leaders in free elections and know in their hearts that the individual wields power in the workings of the greater community. The problem lies

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in the culture of unification, what is referred to by Bromfkidorans as the Great Principle that mankind should by natural law live under the guidance of the Parliament of Nations of the United World. In our language, Stomo Nomchitka do Bromfkidoro. We all want to live in filial peace, but we must arrive at the mode of that peace through mutual respect. The great error of my nation is believing that this is a simple thing which may be applied everywhere to every people in every land without regard for the idiosyncratic variances that make humans what they are. You the citizens of the nations of the world must recognize the Great Principle for the Great Error that it is and further, working together must, one way or another, influence the Bromfkidorans to recognize it also."

Our parliament was impressed, but there was grave doubt as to whether those of the United States, Great Britain, Russia, France or any of the other great powers would be. Anyone who bothered to read the international press over the following weeks would have seen that the threat faced by the world

at large was routinely trivialized. Cruel caricatures of Ola and myself were the bread and butter of cartoonists. I was depicted as some parody from a minstrel show while my dear Ola was made to be some stretched and gangly bird faced horror. It was only in California that we were taken seriously.

My job had been filled in my absence and, although the government and the diplomatic department had granted me a pension, I found myself at loose ends. The problems before us were enormous but as of yet, we had discovered no agreed upon way of dealing with them.

My wife, myself and the refugees were the only ones who seemed interested on a daily basis in Bromfkidor as a diplomatic problem.

I finally approached William Richardson with the idea of setting up a department devoted to the study of Bromfkidor. We would not only study diplomacy, but also language, culture and technology. Among the crew of the stolen Borodna Kora were engineers who could build skyships of the same type. While we had heard of successful experiments in the United States of so called "heavier than air" craft, these new devices could fly circles around them. The art of constructing them could not help but publicize our cause and further, generate a whole new industry for California.

The government agreed and I was made head of the new Department of Far Southern Contact. I also at the same time

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became chairman of the board of the Californian Skyship Corporation and set to work building a new ship that would carry a crew of diplomats and scientists back to the land beneath the world.

Here ends the narrative of
Woodrow Hammond.→

Afterword

During our interviews Woodrow Hammond and I became good friends and over the time I knew him he related to me other tales of his life, for he had been a key player in the entire history of the outside world's relations with Bromfkidor. He returned to the Antarctic continent many times during his life, playing many roles. On some occasions he was there with the interests of a private citizen, later in his life as the ambassador from the Empire of California when he was instrumental in negotiating the treaty of 1933. When the war came, he was there to fight the good fight side by side with the common soldier. It was Woodrow Hammond who brought to us the wonder of air travel which we so take for granted today. Finally, in telling his story he becomes a latter day Marco Polo who reveals the mysteries which have shrouded the unknown republic of Bromfkidor. Much as he

might have claimed that he wanted a peaceful life, I could not help but see the fire in his eyes when he spoke of his adventures.

This man who had started life as a humble cowboy's son, went on to a life of lusty exploit so remarkable that in my acquaintance with him in the last years of his life he was only able to tell me a small portion of them. The life of Woodrow Hammond had only barely begun at the time he married a princess from a lost civilization at the palace of the Emperor in San Francisco, for even more remarkable is the tale of his return to the land beneath the world. That story, however, I must save for another day.→

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Book 2

PEOPLE OF THE SKY

INTRODUCTION

In the year of the U.S. bicentennial, a man came to my home city of Cambridge Massachusetts to deliver a series of lectures at M.I.T. on the subject of the history of skyship technology.

As everyone knows, this technology originated in Bromfkidor, the hidden Antarctic republic. He who came to speak was none other than Woodrow Hammond, the man who brought the first skyship out of that remote nation. Due to a chance meeting, I was favored with the rare privilege of hearing that epic tale from his own lips. It was also my pleasure to publish his narrative in the form of a book for the edification of the general public.

Those of us who have ever read Arnesen's "Peoples and Lands of the Antarctic" have been burdened with the task of wading through page upon page of academic digression without gaining any feeling of what those lands and peoples are really like.

I believe that if my telling of Mr. Hammond's memoir was well received at all, it was due to the fact that it contained only a minimum of dry, scholarly description.

Woodrow Hammond was a citizen of the Californian Empire and during his life had the opportunity to serve that nation in many ways both in government and in business. He popularized lighter-than-air skyships just at

the time our civilization was about to wander down the blind ally of powered gliders, or, as they were known, "aeroplanes".

The Woodrow Hammond I knew was a elderly gentleman of simple tastes and ways. At the time we met he was nearing his one-hundredth birthday but still demonstrated a remarkable vitality and sharpness of mind. No one can say how long a life he might have had were it not for the common street accident

in San Francisco which took his life at the age of one-hundred and three.

In the period that he lived in Cambridge, I got together with him frequently for coffee or a beer or two. On those occasions I would always try my best to get him to remember some episodes out of his astonishing life. In the weeks preceding Christmas 1976, he told me the story of his first trip to the far south. He returned to California to be with his children, grand children and great grand children for the holidays and returned refreshed and ready for his lecture series to continue.

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We would get together on some evenings afterward where he could be easily convinced to speak at length about anything but the history of skyship technology. He was, as you well know, a key player in the first major skyship corporation outside Bromfkidor and I happened to ask him about the early days of the California Skyship Corporation. Rather than speak of skyships directly, he chose to tell me of how his life had been changed by becoming an important man. This was how I heard the unique story of his second trip into Bromfkidor and the amazing effect that that journey had upon the rest of the world. As a new year blew into Cambridge in the form of deep and crunchy snow, I was transported by the words of Woodrow Hammond back to the warmer days of the spring of 1906 in San Francisco.

Chapter One Sunset Heights

He was a strange but handsome child, my Johnny, Negro features, gray skin, green eyes and wavy chestnut hair. No other child in Sunset Heights looked like him, Dzhonith D. Hammond, my son. His mother was to my eye, the most beautiful woman ever crafted by mother nature and her grace and sureness of movement were passed on to him.

Around the house he marched or ran in his little sailor suit finding his way in and out of trouble and disturbing my work or rest whenever it took his fancy, for in this way he took after me. In my own youth I was a scrapper and a street urchin, a gambler and a thief, had it not been for the intervention of a rich lady who paid for a first class education for me, I might well have died in the gutter. Sometimes I find myself being caught up in the might-have-beens, all the different ways things could have gone but for one tiny circumstance. It was just such a lucky circumstance that led to my child having many of the advantages that otherwise he might not have. His life was to be very different from the one I had as a child. I had grown up middle class but surrounded by the temptations of the street. Johnny had only the

best life had to offer and would likely never even meet a truly disadvantaged child.

The reason for this was wealth. For the first time in my life, I controlled a fortune the magnitude of which even I was not sure. When I returned from Bromfkidor, the remote republic

of the Antarctic, I made my escape from that land by the skin of my teeth pursued by agents of a newly installed government which was hostile to the one which I represented, I brought with me a fully crewed skyship of an entirely unknown type. Having done so I set about manufacturing them with help from the imperial government and the engineers who were among the crew. In only a few short years these sleek whales of the sky have become the paramount method of transport in western civilization, and it all started with my corporation in the nation of California.

As I watched my son play I felt a hand upon my shoulder and turned around only to find myself receiving a warm kiss from the

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fascinating beauty that I have the good fortune to call my wife.

Ola Sharomna! It is the misfortune of the world of literature that she did not become the consort of a poet rather than a businessman, for she could inspire enough sweet lines to fill ten volumes. But she had made herself mine and come to live in this alien land, this light gray, green eyed exotic princess of a lost civilization. And when she would speak, what sweet endearment would emerge?

"Woodrow, you had really best be getting on to the office! You are going to be late!"

"Dearest Ola, I'm the boss, they can't start without me."

"I know, so go to work." One more kiss and I was on my way.

The Californian Skyship Corporation yard was located on a small peninsula at the end of Oakdale avenue just northeast of Imperial Stadium. Sometimes I would take up one of the smaller ships just so I could see the game. Even from a great distance, the Imperials were a thing of beauty.

My little Ford carried me up 19th through the park to Fulton. Before leaving the park I allowed myself the luxury of admiring the fresh buds which emerged from every branch of every tree. Spring was a little early this year and was filling me with the optimism of a fresh start. From there I went straight to Norton Palace to pick up Dzhidro Alprendauro, the Bromfkidoran president of my company who was meeting with some people from the Emperor's court. I was hoping that all had gone well here, for if it had, we would be returning to Bromfkidor very soon.

In 1906, Norton Palace was only eight years old and still had the gloss and grandeur that marks a nation's symbol of itself before it acquires the trappings of irony. This huge and glorious structure was the reflection of every Californian's dreams of his country's place in the world. The building itself occupies about twelve acres and is surrounded by an additional twenty six acres of park and garden. The palace was built during the short reign of William I and is regarded as his major accomplishment. That emperor, the first of the current dynasty, was originally a rough hewn gunfighter, gambler and opportunist who made himself indispensable to Emperor Norton as his Prime Minister and aide. The first monarch was not entirely able to deal with every situation he would be called upon to handle, whereas Bill Hickok was well known as a man not to be trifled with. He had barely escaped death on any number of occasions and had he not found God, he might well have perished uselessly before even the founding of the

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empire.

On his death bed, Norton named him as his successor and although William himself died within three years of his coronation, he did leave this magnificent palace that he will forever be remembered for.

Outside the palace stood Dzhidro. I still had not gotten used to seeing Bromfkidorans in Californian street clothes. This very tall eagle featured gray man stood out in any crowd. He still wore his hair long in the fashion of his people and many folks mistook him for an Indian albeit one of very peculiar color. I pulled up and called for him to get in.

His news wasn't good, the diplomatic staff felt that the time was wrong and that we should wait until next year.

"Out of the question!" I said "The situation in your homeland cannot continue. Montolla is building up for war, if someone doesn't intercede it could mean disaster, not only for Bromfkidor but for the whole world!"

Buerno Montolla was the new king of Bromfkidor, enthroned while I was there in 1903.

"Woodrow, their refusal does not prohibit the mission, they merely won't fund it. We could go on our own."

"Parliament has already made it clear that it will not allow us to act on our own in a diplomatic capacity. Our laws

specifically forbid individuals from attempting any governmental contact without the direct involvement of Parliament and the Crown."

"So you have told me. What about a purely business venture? Surely the Imperial government exercises less control if two corporations make a deal for trade, right?"

"Have you forgotten that we are wanted men in Bromfkidor?"

"Not for a moment, but the authorities do not have to be made aware of our presence. Once we have made contact with the financial interests, I suspect that the government will forget about our little theft of a skyship, particularly if we replace it with a better one."

Dzhidro was president of California Skyship because he was such a very clever fellow, but on this occasion he seemed to be out of touch with the facts.

"You seem to forget that a dozen police officers and an entire ship's crew perished during our escape."

"The unfortunate truth is that those deaths are not the sensitive issue. Your escape is."

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"So let me understand this, it is your proposal that we, wanted criminals that we are, sneak into Bromfkidor without being detected, set up a deal with a major skyship manufacturer and then present that deal as a forgone conclusion to both the Californian and Bromfkidoran governments. Have I left anything out?"

"Please do not mock me Woodrow, I believe that private interests in Bromfkidor might find themselves at odds with the government."

While Dzhidro made a less than compelling case, he was living proof that Bromfkidor was not universally xenophobic.

We entered the yards of the California Skyship Corporation and parked the little roadster by the entrance to the main administration building.

My office looked out on the main yard where the ships were constructed and this yard was at present dominated by the "Norton" which was to be the flagship of the new Californian fleet. The craft was an enormous wedge-shaped airfoil about eight hundred feet across and one thousand feet long. When completed it would carry arms, armor, two smaller skyships and four hundred crewmen.

This ship was to be the first of five sister ships which would form the core of California's defense in the future.

This was a view that I found most inspiring, this and Dzhidro's prodding led me to the decision that I would put together my own crew and fly to Bromfkidor myself.

This decision was made on the twenty-first of March.

Over the next few days I would make arrangements to finish the Norton which would be used for the journey. Although the ship was manufactured for the Californian government, it had yet to be christened and mustered into service and was therefore still the property of California Skyship. While the government would probably complain bitterly, I was within my legal rights.

All of the Bromfkidorans in my employ volunteered to help crew

the ship and I had contacted other experts in various localities with the invitation to accompany us.

Two of these people were in residence at the Dilmount Institute at Mulweeno in the U.S.A., Doctors Elroy Franklin and Alexander Rodman Molloy who were doing some of the technological work which was improving the skyship industry. We hoped that they could help us to put together a sales demonstration which would aid in opening the doors of this closed nation of Bromfkidor.

On the day before we were to leave Dzhidro approached me with

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an unusual individual in tow. This man who chose to be known to us as "Sourdough Bob" was a representative of a Canadian bank who had possible financial interests in our mission. Also by virtue of having done much work for them in the Yukon Territory, he was an expert on some of the kind of adverse conditions we might encounter in the Outer Waste, the frigid region which surrounds Bromfkidor.

We would later learn that he was also something of a poet.

By the thirtieth, the Norton was fully prepared with all the special equipment required. Among these things were a powerful wireless telegraphy set, devices to heat and therefore increase the lifting power of the helium used to buoy up the giant ship as well as two smaller skyships, about two hundred feet long each.

With the ship in readiness and the Californian portion of the crew in place we prepared to set off for the United States.

My wife was left in charge of California Skyship and the maintenance of wireless communications. I had no idea how long would be our separation or what the consequences of our business.

I was well aware that, given my status in the land beneath the world, this could possibly be the last time I would ever see my mate. Little did I realize how close to happening this would come and even less did I suspect the form it would take.

On the morning of the thirty-first, we loaded the last of the supplies and cast off for Mulweeno in the southern U.S.A..

Chapter Two Mulweeno

Before my first trip to Bromfkidor I had had no experience with air travel. Now, I was the foremost expert among the non-Bromfkidorans. Having had a chance to view large tracts of land from the air, I was granted the opportunity to learn how one sees the land from the vantage point of a ship of the sky.

Whenever people ask me what it is I see when I observe the land from the sky, my answer always seems to disappoint them.

Perhaps they expect me to speak of the wide fields cultivated by men wherever I go, perhaps they wish to hear of how the great buildings or bridges look from the air. I always have to tell them of the single feature which I see again and again wherever man lives in the American continents... baseball diamonds.

They are everywhere. Whenever you look down you see at least ten of them from horizon to horizon, evidence of the game of baseball and the huge number of people who enjoy it.

This is what I saw for my entire journey across the United States, baseball diamonds here and there, but one stood out even as it first appeared at the foggy horizon. In the entire nation of the United States of America there was no finer a baseball field than that at Dilmount Stadium outside the city of Mulweeno in the southern state of Napoleana.

Even from miles away we could see the balloons which floated over a game in progress. Even though we were literally a mile above the action of the game, in our minds we could hear the cheers of the spectators. Although the sport was first conceived in distant New York, it might just as well have

been invented here, for the lovers of the game had truly made it their own. It was at this field that some of the greatest games in history had been played and further it was this field that was the living symbol of the city which we now were approaching, for this is a city of sport as well a scholarship. Sport as well as culture. Here was the home of the Dilmount Airedales who recently bested even my own beloved San Francisco Imperials. Dilmount Stadium was the spirit of Mulweeno.

Even against the remarkable panorama of the history of the United States of America, the story of this city and this state stands out as unique.

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I hope you who are students of United States history will indulge me by forgiving a somewhat lengthy digression over well trodden ground.

In 1794 the area that was to become the southern Athens was the site of a small trading post on the Matahatchie river in what was then far western Florida. This tiny settlement was named for its financial sponsor, the Spanish Duke of Muljuino.

The post was ideally situated for the many trappers, prospectors and con-men who frequented the region, thus the little town prospered. In the wheeling and dealing which characterized land speculation in the new world at the time, Muljuino became part of the territory of Louisiana, which in turn became the subject of one of the great land deals of all time. In 1803, the young United States purchased Louisiana from France. The deal was a good one for both sides, the U.S. doubled its size and Napoleon Bonaparte got to pay off some of his war debt. As a minor stipulation Napoleon asked that a small portion of the land be put aside for his exclusive governorship in the event of personal emergency. It is not exactly known why president Jefferson also gave him a portion of the state of Mississippi and promise of part of Florida, but somehow the deal was done and the principality of Napoleana was founded in 1806. Since the territory was ceded to Napoleon himself and not to the French government, it was brought into the union upon his death in 1821 as a commonwealth. The new city of St. Edmundsburgh became the state capital although the center of culture and commerce remained at the city now known as Mulweeno.

From St. Edmundsburgh in the north to Carib on the Gulf coast, is a long line of towns and cities running the length of the Matahatchie with Mulweeno at the approximate center. This series of communities is known as the "Matahatchie Concourse" and is the only major industrial region in the south. Where neighboring states could grow cotton, the great mills at Mulweeno could make it into cloth. In fact manufactured goods of all kinds come out of Napoleana and were doing so as early as the 1830's. This is the basic economic difference between Napoleana and the surrounding states

that makes it the very unique place that it is. By the 1850's the question of the economic future of the United States was the central issue of the day. Was the U.S. to be a agricultural /slave economy or an industrial/free labor one? Napoleana was in a peculiar position in this dispute, for although the differences were principally regional, the state had much more in common with the north than with the south. 70

There had never been legal slavery in Napoleana and in fact the state had become rather notorious for sheltering runaways. In the southern parlance of the times, "Goin' to Mulweeno" signified a slave fleeing his situation no matter what his destination.

In 1861, Napoleana refused to secede from the Union along with its fellow southern states until Confederate president Davis threatened to invade. The governor, Clovis D. Wilson, yielded to the pressure and declared the state separate from the Union, but in a referendum vote the citizens overwhelmingly refused to join the Confederacy.

During the decades leading up to the Civil War, free blacks had flowed into the state filling jobs at all levels in an atmosphere of racial harmony unknown elsewhere. Governor Wilson was a Creole, several state representatives were black as was one of its senators. There was no way that this state could support the goals of the Confederate States, let alone join them, but they could stay in the union only at great peril. Thus it came to pass that in November of 1861, with the support of French troops and the blessing of president Abraham Lincoln, Napoleana became an independent republic and a neutral party in the war.

The new republic suffered greatly in the conflict as the Confederacy blockaded its ports. The result was widespread hunger in this small, non-agricultural republic. The president, former senator Rodney Beauvais, appealed to Lincoln for help which was promised, but didn't arrive until after the fall of Atlanta. In the last desperate days of the Confederacy, Davis ordered an invasion of Napoleana.

The army of Napoleana was mostly French with only a few native troops. The Confederates captured St. Edmundsburgh and the capital was removed to Mulweeno where it remains to this day. This event came close to causing the French to declare war on the C.S.A. and were it not for counter threats from the British, this might have come to pass. Before the situation could get further out of hand, the south was forced to surrender.

The southern states were quickly readmitted to the Union but Napoleana remained aloof for seven months while freed slaves poured into the tiny nation. Mulweeno became the third largest city in North America. This caused a mild panic in Washington and President Lincoln was moved to

threaten Napoleana with withdrawal of military and financial support if they did not immediately apply for re-admission to the Union.

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Upon re-admission, the state government was ordered by congress to "equalize representation" in leadership. This measure was intended to appease still disgruntled southerners by reducing the power of blacks, but, as it happened it resulted in the first Jewish and Chinese representatives in congress. The federal government soon stopped trying to legislate against racial equality in Napoleana as they found that the trend was slow to spread. Those who wished to live in such an environment simply moved there.

In order to boost the state economy after the war, the city of Mulweeno dropped all controls on "any trade which did no harm to person or property", tacitly legalizing gambling and prostitution. This led to the now popular saying "anything goes in Mulweeno".

Now, Mulweeno is the paramount entertainment city of the U.S. as well as the home of the most important university in the south, the Dilmount Institute.

It was this institution that was our destination in this great city.

The institute was located at the end of Matahatchie Boulevard and spread over about seventy-five acres on both sides of the river.

The ship docked at a mast over the institute's department of static gravity studies. The Norton cast a shadow which plunged much of the institute into darkness as their mast was only tall enough for the standard mail vehicles which service the department on a daily basis.

We were greeted by a brass band composed of students playing the Californian national anthem as we rode down the elevator. One of the noted jass singers of that fair city rendered the

words of the first verse of "California". I found myself wondering at the peculiar fact that this dignified anthem used the tune of a trail song of the fabled "Forty-niners" who's lyrics were less than stately. I had even heard that the original source for the tune was a Swedish sea shanty. Well, the proud anthem of this noble land used the tune from a song celebrating drunkenness and pagan debauchery. The lady who sang "California" was without a doubt the most enormous woman I had ever seen but her voice carried all the way up to the Norton with crystal clarity.

*"I've traveled 'cross this whole great Earth,
seen all there is to see.
But only the land that gave me birth,
is where I want to be.*

*California! The Lord smiles down on thee,
Oh how I love that golden land
and its been good to me."*

*"I have walked your golden valleys,
Rested on your sun kissed shores,
and I have never seen another land,
who's beauty matches yours.
California! If I wander or sojourn,
I'll keep you always in my heart,
till the day that I return."*

It was required of us that we partake of certain hospitalities of the Institute before we could get down to the business of briefing the recruits for our mission.

At the reception Dzhidro and I actually met Professors Franklin and Mollot for the first time. Doctor Franklin was a rather nondescript bespectacled gentleman in his middle years who seemed distracted and would write constantly on a small note pad which was always on his person. Doctor Mollot on the other hand was remarkably young and dynamic with an unruly mop of flaming red hair. His physical condition showed that in spite of the hours that he spent worshipping at the temple of science, he still found time to engage in sport. He was not a particularly tall man, standing a half a head shorter than myself, but he was muscular and broad of shoulder, a miniature Atlas.

On this occasion I was able only to exchange pleasantries with these men and "size them up". The next morning would give me a real chance to learn of the broad conceptions behind their work and the essence of the presentation that would be made before members of the Bromfkidoran business community.

I awoke in the hotel room the next day ready to get things moving. The walk down Matahatchie Boulevard on this refreshing spring morning made me feel optimistically positive concerning this important expedition.

The two professors and I met in Doctor Mollot's laboratory in the physical sciences building. The lettering on the glass door panel identified the lab as the Institute for Parallel Studies.

The odd little workshop contained a number of devices which I could not immediately delve the purpose of. Some of them had highly polished circular plates that were mounted on complicated jointed arms which allowed them to be moved into a great number

of positions. These plates would have suspended at precise distances from them bronze cylinders with steel terminals emerging from them. These terminals would from time to time cause the surrounding air to glow softly in pastel colors.

It was Professor Franklin who spoke first.

"Mister Hammond, I am aware that our purpose on this mission is to show how we can sell the Bromfkidorans improvements for their skyships and thus establish a trade interdependence, but you must know that the opportunity to make this journey will give me a chance to make great strides for science.

"The climate of the land of Bromfkidor is one of the great mysteries of the discipline of Earth Science, for it totally violates our expectations of the polar environment. The city of Tippilina lies within fifty miles of the South Pole and yet the average temperature is around sixty degrees Fahrenheit. How can this be? When we are in Bromfkidor I intend to make a thorough study of the atmosphere and land in order to answer these questions. Further, the fauna of that land is unlike that found anywhere else. It is my intention to take back with us specimens of the various Avisaura of the Antarctic zoological realm."

It was true that I, having been so absorbed with the diplomatic problem posed by Bromfkidor, had paid little attention to the many scientific questions it created. I admit that I myself had often wondered where the people of this land had originated before they migrated to the forbidding Antarctic. Of course only in an atmosphere of friendly relations could these fields of inquiry be addressed.

Doctor Mollot was the next to speak.

"I would like to thank the California Skyship Corporation for inviting me to join the complement of the Norton on this, I am sure to be, historic journey.

"It is true that I have done research which could aid the skyship industry and serve to create ships with abilities hitherto thought impossible. The previously little known phenomenon of 'Static Gravity' can play a great role in controlling the very mass of air vehicles. This, however is only a side effect of the devices which will do this.

"The devices that you see throughout the laboratory are parallel resonant field translators of various types. The cylindrical objects are the heart of the device which I have chosen to label the 'Mollot Cells'. They can generate or remove the effects of mass depending upon how they are stimulated and thus control the weight of a

skyship with the touch of a switch. Expensive helium need never be vented to adjust altitude. This will make the operation of these ships much more cost effective.

"It should be noted, however, that this adjusted mass seems to emanate from some other physical dimension that is little understood and may contain dangers which remain at this time unknown."

The talk of other dimensions was far over my head, and as a result I paid it less attention than perhaps I should have. In the light of the remarkable step forward that the Static Gravity technology represented I hope that I can be forgiven for the oversight.

The next day was taken up with loading the professor's equipment onto the Norton where a space had been provided for a mobile laboratory.

On the fourth of April we cast off from Mulweeno toward the Gulf of Mexico and ultimately, Bromfkidor.

Chapter Three Southward

The Norton left the coast of the United states over the city of Carib on the gulf coast. From there we would cross the Caribbean to the northern coast of South America and thence would make most of our journey over land.

Upon our leaving Mulweeno, Dzhidro Alprendauro assumed command of the Norton and two other of the Bromfkidorans, Mervang Brozhaerd and Lauran Romolido, captained the two smaller vessels.

While I was the commander of the mission, I knew that these experienced men were the best possible to do the job of running the ships and managing the crews.

Now that we were underway, I left the bridge and headed for the recreation room where most of the off-duty crewmen were gathered.

The sort of recreations that I would have expected to find these seasoned sailors of the skyways engaged in was almost anything but what I found. The eccentric Canadian banker known as a "Sourdough Bob" was holding about a dozen crewmen enthralled with a poetry recitation! And my surprise was increased even more when I listened to the subject of his verse.

*"Gather round my friends and hear a tale of bold endeavor,
of the hero Woodrow Hammond, whose deeds will live forever.
Into unknown Bromf-Kay-Dor he traveled to discover,
the secrets of that hidden world, so unlike any other.
He was from California, the empire of the west,
of the strong men of that nation, Hammond was the best.*

*"Now Hammond was a simple man,
a servant to his nation and
apparently unsuited to the laurels
of a hero or adventurer
his training taught him to demure
from all pursuits but settling of quarrels"*

To say that I was stunned would be an understatement. This man had made it his art to render the story of the first diplomatic

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mission to Bromfkidor into some manner of epic verse.

He told the entire story of the mission but focused on my flight from the country with Ola Sharomna. I admit that I was flattered to be so mythologised but I was also embarrassed to have the tale of my courtship rendered into an entertainment for sky sailors. I left the room unnoticed amidst a cascade of his pretty words to seek the relaxing solitude of my own cabin.

*"Beyond the farthest southern sea, beyond Magellan's straits,
beyond the glacier vested cliffs, the skymen's country waits.*

*Beyond the snow cloaked mountains, which are this empire's shore,
are the clear and temperate, mellow skies, of the land of Bromf-Kay-Dor!*

*Behold the lofty cities upon each mountain's crest,
the skyships course between them, upon the land's broad breast."*

I heard these words echoing in the corridor as I walked down to my room. The memory of my escape in '03 had many painful aspects for me, not the least of which was the horrible death of Dzhonith Shopari at the hands of his jailers during an escape I initiated. This man, in a desperate attempt to turn his government away from a militaristic course had kidnapped me so that he and my future wife, the princess Ola Sharomna of Pojona could warn our diplomatic party of the Bromfkidoran government's intent to take over the world. I failed to protect them from arrest and had to break them out of prison. Shopari met his violent end in that jailbreak and to this day I have nightmares about it. This guilt did to some extent drive me on this mission, it is true, but I have never been one to allow the follies and failures of the past cripple my spirit. Miss Amilia Andrews, the lady who changed my life and paid for a first class education for me, instilled in me the idea that the past is healed by creating a better future and I have never gone wrong in living by that philosophy.

The trip over the Caribbean was uneventful and the weather was beautiful. As we approached South America we had our last direct wireless contact with San Francisco, from here on we would have to rely on repeater stations to relay the content of our messages for us.

In the following days we passed first over the farms and cities of Greater Colombia, then the sultry Amazon jungles which eventually gave way to the high white capped peaks of the remote

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Andes. From that region we cut south along the coast until we reached Santiago which would be the last contact with civilization in our own world. There we took on some final supplies along with a few new crewmen to fill out the day to day staff of the Norton.

On the twelfth of April, we departed from our world's last outpost. Within another two days we found ourselves crossing the small stretch of ocean that separated Tierra del Fuego from the tip of the Antarctic continent, the land known to the Bromfkidorans as Palmiroj. This desolate peninsula was very much as I had remembered it. It was, if anything, even more forbidding looking than the last time I had been here because that had been in the Antarctic summer while now was the early part of winter. This land had only recently been visited by the Bromfkidorans for the first time as it is

the remotest part of the region they call the Outer Waste. They only regularly visit a very thin rim of this land which surrounds their country and were totally ignorant of anything lying beyond it until they were first contacted by the explorer Arnesen in 1896.

Arnesen was saved from certain death by a Bromfkidoran scientific mission to the Outer Waste after getting hopelessly lost seeking a route to the South Pole. He had been brought before the leaders of that society who viewed him as an unparalleled curiosity and finally escorted him to the shores of the continent which they themselves had never seen. Arnesen wrote a scholarly book about Bromfkidor, giving the world its first look at this, the last lost civilization but showed no inclination to return there. He had in fact been invited to join this mission and turned it down. The hostility of the Bromfkidorans to outsiders make this understandable and further, I am informed, Arnesen himself is not so easy to get along with. My dear friend Dzhidro Alprendauro met Arnesen on the occasion of his departure from Bromfkidor which is how he acquired his familiarity with the Danish language, and he felt that Arnesen sensed that the Bromfkidoran government could not be trusted and was filled with fear of ever returning to that region, as a result. Personally, I do not know if that is true or not, but it would serve to neatly explain his lack of enthusiasm for returning to Antarctica.

Indeed, there was much to fear from the Bromfkidorans. I had discovered the last time I had visited the republic beneath the world that the general political conception was of a united world under the government of Bromfkidor. The official name of the nation was in the native language "Stomo Nomchitka do Bromfkidoro",

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translation, the Parliament of the United Nations

of the World. Arnesen knew this and I had found it out, and we would both be considered dangerous to the process of "uniting the world". It must be remembered that before 1896, as far as the natives of this region were concerned, Bromfkidor was the entire world. Knowledge that there were inhabited lands beyond the Outer Waste were an unwelcome revelation.

This, I had learned, was the "great principal" of the Bromfkidoran world view. Their world had been torn apart by a huge general war which had all but pushed their civilization back to the stone age. Had it not been for the emergence of the warlord Dzhidro Bogadnij, that is exactly what would have happened. This general, the governor of the city, then known as Darmal, now as Tippilina made use of the new skyship technology to force all other governments to submit to his power. Ultimately, he became the ruler of all

of the land that he knew as the world and the government we now know in this part of the world was established.

The government of modern Bromfkidor is not an oppressive regime in any sense, but the great principal of its foundation requires that the only power in the world must rest with the king of Bromfkidor. So far as they are concerned, no other government has the right to exist.

This, in a nutshell, was what would make our mission so difficult.

Since, by general principal, the Bromfkidoran government could recognize no other as legitimate, the only form of "diplomacy" that they could conceive involved taking all of humanity under its wing.

One could spend hour upon hour pondering the Byzantine intricacies that have become of our world's attempts at establishing relations with Bromfkidor. I feel somehow that you will forgive me if I refrain from doing so.

Two days after entering Palmiroj, the sky started to take on other colors beside a universal slate gray. Patches of blue showed here and there and we saw for the first time since leaving South America, a bird in the distance. Of course, it wasn't a bird but a member of the tribe of animals native to the Antarctic called "lizard birds" or, as they are known to science, the Avisaura.

The flying varieties of these creatures, upon close examination resemble bats more than they do birds, for they fly using a membrane of skin rather than feathers. Although a great number of the avisaura posses feathers, I find it rather ironic that none of them are of the type who fill the roles that are played by birds in

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our world.

Ahead lay Bontor Sharmodna, the great mountain which the natives of this region use to figure the first cardinal point of their compass. We would, as planned, leave the Norton with a full crew here and proceed into inner Bromfkidor in a less conspicuous vessel.

The "San Francisco" was one of two "parasite" skyships to the Norton and had been selected to make the first attempt to contact trade interests in Bromfkidor. She would fly the Californian flag so as not to be accused of spying but would also fly the flag of Bromfkidor as a gesture of friendly intent.

We were balancing a large number of factors and at the same time hoping not to be noticed until we had actually made a deal.

Our destination was the Prandal skyship works near Strum Kemlin in the country of Brant, one of the seven which combine to form the Bromfkidoran Republic.

After a few hours of preparation, the smaller "San Francisco" detached itself from the Norton and headed, with a small crew, across the mountains toward the center of this remote republic.

Chapter four
The end of "San Francisco"

We crossed over the summit of Bontor Sharmodna into the temperate region which is known as Bromfkidor, the land which was the home of both my wife and my best friend. The skies were almost immediately clearer. Daytime in Bromfkidor is like early twilight in California, but it lasts for

about six months. In fact, it was rather near sunset now, perhaps only two or three more days, that is periods of twenty four hours, before the long night.

Although it would have been prudent to do so, I had left the Norton under the command of her first officer rather than her captain. I felt that I needed Dzhidro by my side in this crucial phase of the mission. The captain of the San Francisco was Mervang Brozhaerd who had been the second officer of the Borodna Kora, the ship in which I had made my escape from the land beneath the world in 1903. Brozhaerd held a job with the California Skyship Corporation as a design specialist and test pilot and also worked as a civilian consultant to the fledgling California Sky Navy. I had absolute confidence in this man so, although both Dzhidro and I "outranked" him, his word concerning the operations of the ship was the final one.

We were approaching the drainage delta of the Molad valley. I knew that somewhere off to the west lay the city of Berszantoj where I had turned pirate and stolen the Borodna Kora and fled with it to South America.

Before we reached the valley, we would have to cross the ridge of mountains which the river cut through as it became a glacier.

Over these mountains rose, in the form of dense fog, the last heat given up by that river before it turned to ice. It should have been no surprise that we would find creatures of the air who would make a home for themselves among them.

"Look!" The word was shouted by a crewman who was pointing out to the portside of the ship.

They were still far away, but already we were in awe of the remarkable size of the creatures. A flock of flying avisaur with wingspans of at least forty feet each was heading in our direction. I would never have believed that anything so large could ever fly

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without benefit of buoyant gas, but the evidence was here before my eyes multiplied a hundred times, for that was the approximate population of this flock. Never had I seen a sight of this magnificence. Each of the airborne beasts had a head at least five feet from tip of the long pointed beak to the base of the neck. I tried to imagine how the immense creatures stood the amazing stresses involved in flight. The entire wing of these strange quasi-birds was supported by an outlandishly elongated little finger from which a fur covered membrane of skin was stretched to its side.

These lean dragons were the very spirit of flight embodied. If there is a god of the sky, this creature is surely his messenger. I learned later that this winged wonder is known locally as "daurodna", "the shadow" because of the way a flock would darken the earth when they pass over.

The flock, as if under the influence of one mind, turned in the direction of the ship. Whether instinct or curiosity drew them to us we will never know but as they came closer it became apparent that they were not going to veer off.

I shouted to the captain to pull away but it was too late for the first of the huge creatures had already met its death at the cost of our port engine. another and another of the beasts flung themselves against the ship, each one doing grievous damage

to the already crippled skyship.

The ship pitched slowly end over end tossing all aboard around like rag dolls. As we struck a mountainside, the keel broke releasing the majority of the gas and depositing most of the crew, including myself, on the ground. Those of us who were still alive were witness to the dual sights of the flock of avisaur surviving members winging toward the horizon and the remains of the San Francisco rolling down the mountain engulfed in flames.

The great good fortune of skyship travel is that due to the low mass of the vehicles, even the greatest catastrophes take place a good deal more slowly than does, for instance, a train crash. All of us who had been precipitated from the ship were in more or less sound shape, and we expected to find at least a few survivors among those who stayed with the remains of the ship.

As well as myself there was Dzhidro who was in fine shape save for some bruises and the rest of the bridge crew with the worst injury being a broken arm. While painful, it would not prevent the victim from getting down the mountainside which seemed to have an easy trail. Doctor Franklin had been knocked unconscious which

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caused some worry, but a half hour saw him awake with a headache and nothing more. In all we were twenty-one with twenty-seven unaccounted for.

We elected to make our way immediately for the wreck to rescue as many of our companions as possible and salvage those things required for our simple survival.

The flames extinguished themselves almost as soon as they had started which made us optimistic regarding survivors.

It took us about sixteen hours to reach the wreck where we found nineteen living people in good health. Seven had been crushed beneath the carcass of the ruined ship, one was simply missing, most likely thrown from the ship before it struck the mountain.

After salvaging what we could, we set out for the interior as the sun edged ever closer to the horizon. We had no way to signal the Norton as the

wireless set had been completely destroyed in the wreck. Therefore, making for the nation's central region was our only choice if we wished to survive. I was almost apoplectic with fury over having met with so enormous a failure at this early stage of the enterprise. My choices were now very limited and those of us who were not already dead were in very grave danger.

Mollot was sure that if certain supplies could be secured, he could construct a wireless set suitable to the task of signaling for help. We would have to make ourselves known to someone soon also to get medical help for those of us who required it. If I was seen by anyone in authority in this land I would be taken into custody immediately, most likely never to see the light of day again. Without our ship for easy mobility, this now seemed inevitable.

The next "afternoon" The sky started to take on the colors of sunset. This is a phenomenon which in our world, although beautiful, is seen as commonplace. Not so for the Bromfkidorans who see it only once a year. Those Bromfkidorans who had taken up residence in California had never quite gotten used to seeing it every day. I have had terrible troubles with tardiness in my Bromfkidoran workers due to the strange fact that they have always been used to a twenty-five and a half hour "day". The human body's cycle does not respond to the movements of the sun at these latitudes. The result in California is that they never can get used to getting up at the same time every day.

In the Antarctic, sunset lasts for a week or so during which the Bromfkidorans observe "Nightcomming", a holiday of personal reflection and celebration of the harvest.

As we traveled further toward civilization the sky became ever

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more colorful.

Night in the wilds of Bromfkidor has dangers unknown to men of the outside world, therefore when I saw that the native Bromfkidorans among us were filled with worry over what we might face out here, I too became very cautious.

As we were about to make camp on the third day since San Francisco went down, we heard a sound in the distance among the trees. Before any of us could react to it in any way, an enormous predatory avisaur burst from cover.

The creature stood at least thirty feet tall with its height further accentuated by a tall and gaudy coronet of brightly colored feathers. I had seen such an animal on my previous odyssey in this land and I was now being disappointed in my wish to never see one again. The monster let forth with a hellish scream and leapt upon the man it stood nearest to, Williams

the telegrapher, killing him instantly with a single snap from its dagger toothed jaws. It reared up from his kill glaring at the rest of us as we backed away, fanning wide the feathers on its arms, tail and head. Were we not the animal's victims, I think we might have seen great beauty in the creatures display.

I saw that our cook, a pig-tailed Chinese named Lao, was mesmerized by the sight of the beast who, I realized, much resembled the dragons seen in so much of that nation's art.

I can only imagine the thoughts that went through his mind in the seconds before the screaming horror tore him in two.

By this time Sourdough Bob had drawn his pistol and was firing repeatedly, if ineffectually, at the enormous avisaur who seemed only to be irritated by the bullets but not so much as to give up an easy meal. We had only the small caliber pistols as weapons and many more of us could fall to this gigantic marauder before they could drive him off. Again the monster screamed and leapt upon another hapless victim tearing free from captain Brozhaerd his left arm and trampling him underfoot.

I was now quite sure that the end had been reached for us all as no force at our disposal would fell this demonic foe.

It turned now to me and leapt as I heard a loud report ring out from beyond the trees. The creature bowled me over but only with the feathery "sleeve" of its arm which now pinned me to the earth. I heard only silence and for a scant second imagined myself to be dead, but then realized that I was held down by the monster's dead body.

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Parting the huge feathers and gaining my feet I was greeted by the sight of a man emerging from among the trees with one of long hunting rifles indigenous to this region in his hand.

He was a bearded Kozar, one of the Gypsy-like nomads of Bromfkidor.

"Woodrow Hammond," he called, "I am glad you are not dead!"

My astonishment at being alive was well matched with my astonishment that this stranger knew my name, but as he came closer I recognized him as Halord Bishindi, my friend and ally from my last visit to Bromfkidor.

Renewing my acquaintance with my old friend would have to wait until the carnage wrought by the creature, which I now thought of as "Lao's Dragon", was attended to.

Captain Brozhaerd never regained consciousness and died within a few hours. The greater part of Lao was never found and the young Californian who was the dragon's first victim had never even seen what had killed him, so quickly it had taken place.

With great caution we buried our dead, for it was certain that others of the monster's ilk lurked in this forest.

Halord informed me that his clan was nearby and would be glad to guide us to a safe haven.

We walked a few miles to come upon a small temporary village of tents and wagons which are characteristic of the Kozars. Upon our entering the camp, some women rushed forward to attend to our obvious medical needs. Evidently Kozar women are the great folk healers of Bromfkidor whose reputation is well appreciated far and wide in this land.

Having been fed and given warm clothes, I now sat down with Halord Bishindi to catch up on doings hereabouts in my absence.

Chapter Five
Among the Kozars

The early evening in Bromfkidor is a pleasant time even in the oncoming of winter. The weather was in fact refreshingly autumnal and sitting by the fire with my old comrade brought with it all the warmth that the night air lacked.

Having spent some time explaining to Halord how I had come to be in Bromfkidor, and the peculiar conditions under which I left, I now asked how he had fared in the intervening years. Halord had last seen me jumping out a hotel window in Tippilina three years before.

"Woodrow Hammond, I never heard another word about you after that moment. I was briefly imprisoned until it became clear that I had done nothing personally that could be pointed to as hostile to the government. After my release I appealed to my representative on the Guidance Committee as to your fate but no answers could be found.

"I left Tippilina and rejoined my clan. Kozars are not the most welcome people in the cities, my friend, and I was given plenty of encouragement to move on. There was nothing else I could do except pick up my life as I had left it.

"The new king spent a lot of time and effort on instilling in the people a revived reverence for the Great Principal without saying too much about why."

My Kozar friend referred to the principal which saved Bromfkidor from destroying itself in general warfare by uniting all of it, the whole world as far as they knew at the time, under one government. The Great Principal states that the world can endure only if it is united.

Halord continued,

"Even now, there is little awareness by the average person of any lands beyond Bromfkidor. 'Rumors and fairy tales' they say whenever it is brought up. Everything and everywhere you speak of is so much bigger and grander than anything in Bromfkidor! Arfika and Yo-Rope! Merika and Ay-Zha! These sound like mad fantasy to our people! You told us that there were almost one thousand million people in a land called 'Czaina' when most people know for a fact that there are only a fraction of that number in the

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whole world! I tell people that I have met a man from the far off land of 'Kala Forna', and they laugh, for who takes the word of a Kozar? It is my opinion that the King's Table wishes to keep the outside world a 'rumor' for as long as possible."

I have noticed that the name of my native land is almost universally pronounced "Kala Forna" by Bromfkidorans. The reason for this is that these are the words light and the Moon in the native tongue of this region. Whenever we say "California", they hear "Moonlight". I'm sure that this also contributes to fairy tale sound of it all when we claim to come from a land called "Moonshine".

"Halord, I'm sorry you got into trouble because of knowing me, but I must ask you what may be a difficult and perhaps dangerous favor."

I had not actually known Halord very long at the time we last parted company but he never hesitated in that short time to help me in any way. Even so, I found his answer slightly surprising.

"Woodrow Hammond, a month or two in jail was a small price to pay for such a jolly adventure! This is the way of the Kozar. It is a great honor you do me by giving me an opportunity to stand shoulder to shoulder with a man of great spirit such as yours!"

It gratified me to hear this, for I had discovered within my self a similar craving for adventure on the last occasion that I found myself in these lands.

"Halord, if that is how you feel, then what I need is this. We are to go to Strum Kemlin, which I believe is the city of your birth, and make contact with the directors of the Prandal works. This will be a great service to both our nations. Our nation has something your people will want, something that will make them want to talk to us. Beyond Bontor Sharmodna is a skyship bigger and with a longer range than any your people have constructed and we are here to trade its secrets."

Halord looked at me skeptically.

"My friend, you labor under the delusion that people actually wish to find ways to solve their differences. They do not. Most of the human race has always sought out, rather than sought to avoid, conflict.

"I will guide your party to Strum Kemlin, but I doubt that you will be able to break the barrier of the Great Principal."

"I must try, my friend," I said, "for the failures of my last venture in Bromfkidor must be set right."

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We spent two weeks in the Kozar camp making ready to cross most of Bromfkidor to reach the city of Strum Kemlin in the stoma of Brant.

Ever since we had crossed into the temperate region of Bromfkidor, Dr. Franklin had seemed distracted. Only in moments of danger did he seem to be wholly with the rest of us. In the remainder of the time he had been watching clouds and taking temperatures and scribbling in his note book. He spent hours conferring with Mollot and quizzing the Kozars and the ship's crew about Bromfkidoran weather patterns. I wanted to ask him what he was up to. In spite of the fact that experience told me that I would not understand the answer, I felt I must inquire.

My opportunity to do so came when I was taking a walk outside the camp. I found him weighing a soil sample about a quarter mile from the rest of the party.

"Doctor Franklin, may I be so bold as to ask what the nature of your research here is?"

Franklin looked up from his work and seemed slightly embarrassed.

"Mister Hammond, I was hoping that I would know more before anyone asked me that. My studies concern the environment of this land. Are you

aware that the temperatures here average at least one hundred degrees higher than would be predicted by science?"

I confessed that it seemed that the polar regions should be much colder than we have found them. I also admitted that I had sought no explanation for the seeming discrepancy.

The professor responded, "The atmosphere of this planet is an engine driven by the heat of the sun. The motion imparted results in a number of great winds, convection currents, defining meteorologic regions, these serve to isolate the tropics from the temperate zones and the temperate zones from the polar regions. Further, the poles receive far less energy from the sun than do the lower latitudes due to the low angle of the sun in those regions. these effects should combine to render the polar regions very cold indeed, but here we find an environment not unlike that of southern France. Why?"

"It is my belief that this is a meteorological anomaly and an unstable one at that. As the world becomes more industrialized, the atmosphere will be changed by pollutants and this will be enough to destroy this insulated environment."

"Do you think," I asked, "that the natives know anything about this?"

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"If they do not, they will soon find out as they learn more of the world."

It seemed a good idea to keep this disturbing theory to my self, at least for the time being.

Our party, even with the help of the Kozars had come a very short distance and I was starting to fear that we would not be able to cross the vast amount of land in a reasonable amount of time using only the dray beasts which pulled the wagons. I spoke to Mollot, begging him to find a way to signal the Norton in order to reclaim some semblance of our original mission. He said that he would devote himself to figuring something out whereupon he began quizzing all the Bromfkidorans regarding local technology so that he would know what sort of things might be available.

It was on the third day of sunset that we spotted the little house. It stood by itself near a small stand of trees, a lone hunter's cabin. Smoke issued from the chimney indicating that someone was home. From the side of the roof a wire led to a series of poles which faded away to the horizon showing the house to be equipped with a "fartalk" the local version of a telephone. The occupant would be able to contact the authorities if he felt threatened.

Professor Mollot tapped me on the shoulder and whispered, "I have an idea."

Interlude

(A note to the reader: this portion of the narrative was given to me by Woodrow Hammond in the form of a newspaper clipping from the "Police Blotter" section of a local news sheet from Mekhrandur, Bromfkidor.)

A REPORT TO THE POLICE DEPARTMENT OF THE TOWN OF OLN, MEKHRANDUR.

My name is Ronard Kurben. I make my living hunting Maredij in the foot hills of the Bontorej Samendra.

I was celebrating Nightcomming by myself when I was summoned to the door by a frantic knock. There I greeted a man in a strange outfit who identified himself as a certain Partner Alprendauro. Over his shoulder I saw many men partly hidden in the twilight some of whom seemed to be small and pale. One was as dark as a thunderhead. Many seemed to be ordinary men. The rest were a bunch of Kozars.

In a panic, I attempted to slam the door and call the police but they forced it open and entered the house. Two of the small white men confiscated my rifle from its place by the door.

The black-faced man entered and politely asked me to sit and Alprendauro pointed out the fartalk to him. I am confused by what happened next. First Alprendauro made a call to somewhere in Strum Kemlin. He and the black-faced man both conversed for a time and finally disconnected. Then he cut the wires from the fartalk and spoke to the black-faced man partly in a strange language while showing him and one of the little white men the device. The part of the discussion that was spoken in the common tongue was still impossible to understand. They were saying that they needed the wire to make a "wireless". How is anything that is supposed to be wireless made with wire? Answer me that and I will be able to sleep soundly.

Although they took no money or anything else of value, save the fartalk, the Kozars raided my pantry. The black-faced man wrote something on a piece of paper and handed it to me. It is written in some sort of code or symbols which I haven't the faintest hope of

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understanding. What he said as he handed it to me was absolute madness. He said that the Moonlight Skyship Company would reimburse me for my losses when they were able and they took my name down. Moonlight?!? I have never heard of such a name for a skyship.

You now know all, for as much as that may be worth. I dearly hope you catch these villains that they may be treated for their madness as well as brought to justice for their crimes.

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Chapter Six

Return to the Sky

Mollot labored over the twisted corpse of the fartalk for several hours before he was even able to tell me if he could do anything with it. At length he showed me a disorganized mass of the alien components strung together by odd lengths of wire on the bench of one of the wagons. At one point on this unorthodox circuit was a few fruits from a nearby tree. They were the citrus fruit now known in markets throughout the world as "Bromfkidor Limes", praised for the sweet pink flesh within the thin green skin. I was told that the acid in their juice would provide the electricity to power our new wireless set.

With Williams dead Mollot or I would have to make the transmission ourselves and neither of us were experienced telegraphers. Further, we could not be sure of the accuracy with which we could tune the signal. We would only have a few minutes of power for each bunch of fruit and the transmission would not be of a very high amplitude when we were transmitting. Even with all these drawbacks, we had to try. We composed a short message "SF down. Need aid. Hammond party.". Over the next forty-

eight hours we took turns keying the message over and over again while the other fetched more fruit. The Kozars thought us insane and after many hours of this work I almost came to agree.

As we were engaged in this desperate attempt to communicate with the Norton, we also kept moving farther away from it. The Kozars had been on their way to Zonn for the Kozar Nightcomming festival when they encountered us and had continued on that course with my party in tow since that time. We went along partly because we had nowhere else to go and partly because it was in the general direction we were headed anyway. It was only now that we were trying to transmit that it was not to our advantage to keep moving away from the Norton.

I made the decision to have the crew from the San Francisco stay put and to let the Kozars go their way when we saw a shape on the distant horizon. At first my heart sank, for I thought it was one of the great dreadnought ships of the republic. As it grew closer though I saw that it was the Norton and we were saved.

About a half-hour later there was a landing car on the ground and

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I was conferring with Lauran Romolido on how next to proceed.

After our report he remained focused and business like which I knew must be hard for him. Mervang Brozhaerd was his closest friend and it had been my duty to tell him of his death. In the future it would also be my task to bring the bad news to the families of all of those who died since the crash.

In spite of objections by Dzhidro, I asked the Kozars if they would like to be conveyed to Zonn. In helping us they had put themselves behind schedule and I wanted to make it right. Also I owed Halord Bishindi for his jail stay, no mater what he said about "jolly adventure". Thus we loaded the entire group, wagons, animals and all aboard the Norton.

As we ascended to the great skyship we reentered daylight for the sun was yet just slightly below the horizon. While it was night on Earth, it was daytime in the sky.

We guided the ship toward the Bromfkidoran southeast and the city of Zonn.

Our party was expected at the Prandal yards because Dzhidro placed a call to their controlling executive when we appropriated

the fartalk from the hunter. We would call again from Zonn. Thence we would have to move fast as our presence would become known when a sky ship of this size appears near a city.

The Kozars were settled in very comfortably in what used to be one of the rearward gas cells.

After leaving Mulweeno we were able to deflate four of them for use as cargo holds and recreation areas due to the use of Professor Mollot's "parallel resonant field translators" or PRFT devices. Mollot explained that they displaced a portion of the ship's mass into another "realm". I'm a little vague on the details of what this was all about but it seemed to work, making a ship that was built to carry four-hundred into one which can carry one-thousand. There was a certain side effect of this process. One or another of the crew reported ghosts at least once a day since the equipment was installed. Doctor Mollot insisted that this was only an illusion caused by what he termed the "confusion of realms", a "damping" problem. Not being of scientific turn of mind, I was unable to follow his reasoning but I trusted in his ability and his assurance that all was well.

The hills, valleys and lakes of Mekhrandur rolled below us in twilight shadow. Those of us who descended below in survey pods would hear the sounds of avisaur twittering or growling according to their type. When near settlements they would hear

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singing in taverns and the motors of vehicles.

Our views of the Earth became rarer as we moved into the interior of the country because we found it prudent to hide the ship in clouds lest it draw unwanted attention due to its foreign design. It is well that we took this precaution as we found out when the mountain top city of Zonn appeared on the horizon.

Most Bromfkidoran cities are surrounded by gigantic skyscrapers which serve as combination warehouses, hotels and docking masts for the skyships which are the basis of commerce in this lost world.

At one such mast outside Zonn was docked a huge military skyship which both Dzhidro and I instantly recognized as the Bontor Do'alina which was the first ship to meet me in this land when I first journeyed here in 1903. It was also the ship on which Dzhidro had served as a flight lieutenant for two years. Its captain, Sharold Zandt, would know us both and it was possible that his ship could out run us and a certainty that it could out gun us. Our ship had only the lightest defensive arms as we could not risk being caught making an armed incursion into Bromfkidor.

I called Halord Bishindi to the bridge and explained to him that it seemed impractical to leave his party here at this time.

"Woodrow Hammond, never fear," he said, "stay with these clouds as they drift to the southwest. We can find safe landing at the Anchor of the Stars."

I knew exactly of where he spoke, the ancient city of Namina which sits directly at the geographic South Pole.

As we got underway with our escort of clouds, a Kozar Nightcomming festival began in the hold. The sounds of music and revelry filled the ship and those of my crew who were off duty joined in the party as Dzhidro and I stayed with the bridge crew and guided the ship into the falling Antarctic night.

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Chapter 7

Anchor of the Stars

Dzhidro directed the Norton toward Namina where he had many allies in the underground. This was a city where we could be relatively safe at least for a little while. I had a personal reason for being happy to be here and that reason was the Gimbar do Parindra, the Grand National Library.

Instead of docking at a mast, the ship kept station above the clouds and we brought down the Kozars in the "Golden Coast", second of the extension ships which was of a Bromfkidoran type design and therefor less conspicuous.

The people of this city prided themselves on learning and tolerance. In this place, I walked freely among the people as an equal, my first such experience in a Bromfkidoran city. Although my black face drew the eyes of the curious, it was a polite curiosity.

The great library was a huge red sandstone building across the street from the Pojona Stoma administration building. This vast temple to human knowledge was carved from base to summit with images of all the known Bromfkidoran plants and animals. The colossal dome was surmounted with a

globe of the Earth which was quite alien from the one I'm used to, for it showed only the lands of Bromfkidor distorted to encompass a sphere.

I had gained my basic knowledge of this land and its people from the family library at Nomchit Sharomna, but this institution was of an entirely different scale. That at Sharomna family compound was the resource material of an educated layman who already knew the detailed historic and folkloric background of his civilization. It was never intended to be the sole source of one's education of the entire world.

The "Gimbar do Parindra", meaning the palace of wisdom, was devised with the basic education of the public in mind. It was in fact a pre formation institution created by the Convention of Establishment of 1644 a.d. or by Bromfkidoran reckoning, 1326 of Harro do Marsadda founder of Zormia, a dominant religion. The convention, whose principal purpose was to establish permanent frontiers for the nations, was held at what was then the most important city in the world, Mojard in B'Dobna. Today Mojard, like all of the old capitals in the valleys, is of no great cosmopolitan importance. In the Pre-Formation era, none of the major cities in the high mountains existed.

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A Bromfkidoran from one-hundred years ago would not recognize the map of his world. This is why we find this great library in this now obscure town that was the old capital of Pojona, Namina. This place was referred to as the "anchor of the stars" in ancient times because of its location exactly at the geographic south pole.

Look up from this city in the night and it seems that the stars revolve around you.

Here, I was at my leisure to fill in the annoying gaps in my knowledge of this land and its people. Its myths and its fables, the soul of its people.

I would like to give the reader a few samples of Bromfkidoran myth, legend and history.

This is the oldest creation myth I could find. It is Pre-kingdom

Homarian from the oral tradition, written down for the first time about two-thousand years ago by a Mosain scholar.

The World Remade

*Before the people tilled the earth or husbanded
beasts in the world, it was the battlefield of the
gods. The Earth was the ground on which disputes
were settled and on which sporting competitions
were played. The grapplings of these titans pushed*

up the mountains and carved out the valleys. Their hot breath created the clouds and winds. Their blood, tears and sweat formed the lakes and rivers.

For countless centuries this went on until the Earth was so carved up and broken that Mardar, king of the gods, decided to use the land for a new creation. From each god he required a contribution to build life on the broken landscape of the god's playground.

From Alina, goddess of the sky, he got the stars and the color blue and placed them in her domain.

From Daurod, the god of cold and shadow, he got night and the ice of the Outer Waste.

From Haulerm, god of the hunt, he obtained flesh and bones for all the beasts of the world.

It was from Sharod, god of war, that he got the stone and iron for the mountains and from Diera, goddess of fleshly love, that he got desire and passion to flavor the summer day.

Potar, the heavenly messenger, gave speed to the

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winds and Shajorn, lord of the harvest, who sowed grains and vegetables on the land.

When Mardar called upon Dzhibra, the trickster, for his donation, he was met with oily flattery. "My great lord," he said, "the world will be only a thin shadow without your presence. I have made a special creature in your image to hold dominion over this world as your servant."

He presented Mardar with man who resembled him in every detail with the exception that he had been endowed with curiosity.

Mardar had Dzhibra place man in the world to serve his will there, but man was also created partly deaf to the instructions of the gods. When Mardar told man to be taken in awe by the fire of heaven, man merely took the fire of heaven and burned forests. When Mardar told man to take a lesson from the strength of the iron of the mountains, man took the iron from the mountains and made swords to slay his brothers. When Mardar told man to righteously sow his seed in the belly of his wife, he responded by sowing his seed without regard for who's

wife he did so in.

As a result of this the world was again a battlefield but no longer the property of the gods.

Mardar punished Dzhibra for his trick by making him live on the Earth among the men he created where to this day he walks among us leading men into temptation and diverting us from our better nature, for while we can hear his words in perfect clarity, the words of the uncorrupted gods we must listen very hard for.

Another civilization tells a story which is of particular interest to non-Bromfkidorans. This one dates from around the same time as the previous tale, but from an early written tradition of the Ghonarae of eastern Bizaich.

Out of the Clouds

In the beginning all the world was as the Outer Waste is today.

Mankind lived in the sky and frolicked with the gods.

Head of the men was Wallo the clever who delighted in

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gambling with the gods. Wallo won from Torma of the thunder the power to illuminate the night. He won from Illama the beautiful ability to bring joy to all. From Arrom, king of the gods he won the ability to speak with the beasts.

He made the mistake of cheating Yalma, the consort of Arrom and in her anger she took from him all he had save his cleverness and cast him and his kind upon the earth to get by as best as they could.

The people of Wallo came out of the sky into the world. At first the only place humans could live was at the hot springs of Tsen-Dorona (spring of the world) but as men used the water and cast it down on the earth and the earth would thaw and bloom where ever the waters touched. In this way man spread himself over the world.

Man spread until the waters of Tsen-Dorona were used up and that defined the edge of the Outer Waste. Thus today we live in a world which is our prison for the crime of cheating a goddess.

I also discovered various historical digests of which the following excerpt was the most concise in relation to the current period.

The Homarian Kingdoms were a series of nations linked by a common culture flourishing between 1200 b.c. and 100 a.d.

The first Homarian city was Kodra-Shoto on the shore of Godan lake, the source of the Molad river in eastern Keld. It was founded by king Homar who also gave the world its first legal code and its first epic poetry. Legend has it that Homar reigned for one-hundred and twenty years although historians generally believe that he was actually as many as six different men with the same name. In these early centuries the wheel, writing, pottery, bronze work and steel work were all perfected. By the third century b.c. they were using a primitive steam engine to pump water for irrigation and to provide power to cranes for construction. Later governments spread all over western Bromfkidor but were increasingly corrupt at the center. In 96 a.d. nomads had occupied some of the outer provinces. By 110 a.d. the empire had been partitioned under several upstart rulers.

The next thousand years saw the domination of nomad

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traders as the major powers. The end of this period came with the creation of the modern nations, albeit in a state of constant warfare. The Convention of Establishment was ordered by Kheymore XVI, the Zormiatic patriarch, in the interest of world peace.

The religion of Zormia has historically been a major influence on the politics of the Pre-Formation era. It was founded by an itinerant preacher named Harro do Marsadda about 700 a.d.. Harro was a Mosain who are an ancient people of unknown origin.

He extended the monotheist faith of the Mosains to embrace all people through a "dream dictated" commentary on the Chronicle which are the Mosain laws and religious beliefs told in the form of history. This book was called the Zorma (Appendix) which was in later centuries incorporated into Zormiatic versions of the Chronicle. Using converts who had become his followers Harro led a revolt which resulted in

the removal of idols from use in the temples of the holdover religion of the Homarians. Harro was assassinated late in life by an ambitious early church leader and his death is held to be a martyrdom in the name of the religion's purity.

The period between Harro's death and the Convention of Establishment was Bromfkidor's middle ages. In this period Zormia spread and the systems of civilization and nomadism competed for dominance. The Convention identified nomadic peoples and assigned nations to which they were legal citizens. Only the Kozars refused to adhere to their decision and remain nomads in the modern era.

The Convention marked the beginning of the National era which was marked by economic and military conflict which escalated constantly. Technology expanded in this era, but a balance of power was always maintained until the nation of B'Dobna got a head start on the development of a practical military skyship.

What came to be known as the "Formation War" began in 1872 with the launching of attacks on Pojona and Brant by order of Derwint III king of B'Dobna. In spite of definitive superiority of weapons, some skyships were captured and duplicated. Within weeks every old grudge between nations came to the surface and every country was at war with every other. By 1874 there was general lawlessness as the major cities and nations fell from

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power to be replaced by literally hundreds of petty warlords commanding high mountain fortresses. By 1878,

Dzhidro Bogadnij, lord of High Darmal had assembled the most powerful force in the world and compelled all others to pay tribute to him. In 1879 he was able to convene the first world parliament who in 1880 elevated him to the office of king of the new world government. Thus began the New Era.

In my weeks spent exploring the Gimbar do Parindra, I tried to focus my research on things which would give me insight into the national character of the Bromfkidorans.

During the early part of the century preceding the Convention of Establishment, Merlan Do'moritsa, known today simply as Merlan, was at the peak of his career as a poet and playwright. Thirty-one plays and a two

volumes of poems survive from his works all of which have major cultural importance.

The following is a soliloquy from the play "King Norath" which is the most frequently performed of Merlan's plays.

*How can I touch the souls of those who have come
to plot against me? How can I counter the treachery
which insinuates itself into every crack of my life
as Nightcomming crawls into the spaces between the
hills.*

*Ilerro presents himself to me as a friend and ally
while demanding payment for friendship, And in this
reveals himself to be less.*

*Yonder lies the kingdom of Gholandrij where my
destiny is harbored and thence I must go and in Ilerro
I need place my trust and on that trust I must hang my
faith.*

*The circle of stars is of the constancy of my friendship
and so I dare hope that it might be the same for Ilerro,
for he is said to be the most honorable of men and it
is well known what the signs of that honor will be. Ilerro
is the soul of honor in the eyes of my father, in those
of my brothers as well and yet I, before Harro, do swear
that I suspect him! He is a trindut beneath the stairs
waiting to strike me with his venom in an unwary
moment.*

Can the Prophet give me a sign, point me toward an action

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*which will free me to decide the fate of my
kingdom What flicker of flame, what trick of the light,
what random breath of wind can you use to show me the
path that must be trod for victory to be claimed?*

*But hold fast; am I so weak, so much a child that
salvation may not come by mine own hand? Am I of so
forgotten effect that I am a stone which leaves no wave
when cast into the pool? Nay, mine is the judgment
of a king and by that virtue the voice of heaven speaks
through me! Never must I doubt, never must I shrink
from the truth of my own flesh and soul!*

I spent my days here reading a thousand such passages and I must admit that I did lose track of my real mission.

Dzhidro had been talking on a daily basis with the Prandal works but they had become evasive about setting up an appointment. The next morning's news sheet plainly showed the reason, the headline read "RETURN OF THE BLACK PIRATE!"

There was no question that our presence had become known.

Chapter 8
Return of the Black Pirate

I had to assume that it was someone at the Prandal works who told the press of our presence in the country although I thought that only the director, Lodrum D'Gonte, was the only one who knew. I could see no reason for him to tell anyone until he had found out what we had to offer.

Dzhidro advanced the theory that perhaps D'Gonte thought that he might be able to get what we had to offer for free from the government after they had captured us.

Personally, I had no idea but I was becoming increasingly upset at the failures which had dogged our heels since we had entered upon this continent.

Dzhidro insisted that I return to the ship immediately lest the wrong person see me if they have not already. If only I had been one to take good advice.

I had left my notebook in the library and went to retrieve it. The study booth was just as I had left it with my notes in a small cubby next to the desk. As I reached for the book I heard a voice behind me.

"Partner Hammond?"

I turned to see four armed policemen in their distinctive orange head cloths standing in the doorway of the tiny study room. There was no possibility of escape so I allowed myself to be led from the building. Outside, Dzhidro waited already in irons with his own escort. Above our heads I saw the Norton fleeing toward the north hotly pursued by the Bontor Do'alina which had apparently snuck up on us the same stealthy way that we had stayed hidden.

The cops quickly handed us over into the custody of a party of skymen who marched us toward a nearby mast where a small ship was docked. We were brought aboard with polite efficiency and locked in the ships brig. Within a very few minutes we felt ourselves get underway.

We sat in silence and gloom, each in our hearts accusing each other of the failures which brought us to this point. Looking back, I realize that I entered upon this enterprise with both eyes open, but at that moment I felt that Dzhidro had somehow duped me into it.

In a few hours two men appeared to lead us out of the cell. We were taken to the upper deck of the ship whereupon we saw that we now cruised beside the Bontor Do'alina which was connected to

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to this ship by a fragile looking walkway. We were hustled across the swaying bridge where I made the error of looking down and almost lost my balance due to vertigo. Far below us was the blue ribbon of the lower Molad river, we had to be less than fifty miles from Tippilina which resides on a mountain peak at the confluence of that river with the waters of the Darwa. I had been here before.

Once aboard the gigantic ship Dzhidro and I were brought into a small office near the bridge. Standing beside the desk in that room was a man who was familiar to me, Sharold Zandt, the captain of this vessel. Captain Zandt

favoring me with a glance that bespoke a heartfelt contempt but it was for Dzhidro that he reserved his most cutting looks. He strode up to Dzhidro and slapped him hard across the cheek sending him reeling.

"Lieutenant Alprendauro," said the captain, "By order of the king and senate of the Parliament of Nations of the United World, you are relieved of your position and pay in the Sky Service. Further, you have been tried in your absence for the crime of treason and found guilty. Your sentence, to be carried out immediately, is death by being cast overboard."

Although I should have expected something of this sort, I was still shocked to hear these words from Zandt. Dzhidro had straightened up and stood at attention eye to eye with the captain.

He continued; "I would like to add that I am personally offended that a man who served under me for over two years so faithfully, would turn upon the king and the Great Principal in so outrageous a manner. You have dishonored the entire Bromfkidoran nation by your actions and I would like to say that I will take great pleasure in carrying out your sentence."

Zandt did indeed have an expression of grim satisfaction on his face as he pronounced these words. Two skymen appeared at the door of the office.

Dzhidro spoke to the captain. "I have a request."

"Yes, state it please," said Zandt.

"I would like Woodrow Hammond to witness my execution."

I had not the slightest notion why Dzhidro would wish for me to see him die, but I would honor his last wish no matter how peculiar.

"Granted, Partner Hammond will probably follow you after he has been interviewed. He will benefit by seeing what awaits him."

Following the captain out, the two skymen led Dzhidro and I behind him.

We were brought to the lowest deck where the landing cars were

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stored. There was an opening in the floor large enough to accommodate a Pullman coach through which I could perceive a wave tossed sea of clouds only about one-hundred feet below, so close that the balance mast actually cut a wake through them. I am not ashamed to admit that I was relieved that I wouldn't have to see my friend's body strike the Earth.

About two-hundred men stood at attention on the opposite side of the opening. The two skymen led Dzhidro to the edge and Zandt asked if he had anything to say.

Dzhidro turned from the opening and looked the captain directly in the eyes.

"I, Dzhidro Bogadnij Alprendauro, Former lieutenant of the Sky Navy, loyal citizen of the world, servant of Princess Ola Sharomna of Pojona and friend of justice, declare my innocence of the charge of treason. It is true that I have stood in opposition to the Great Principal, but I have done so in the name of justice. The world is bigger than you could know and cannot be forcibly united as strict interpretation of the Principal. I would like to apologize, Captain Zandt, for the discomfort that your carrying out of this execution will cause you in the future. At this time I am sure that you feel what you are doing is right. The future will show you otherwise. I realize that you must do this as your patriotic duty and I forgive you for that."

He turned to me and spoke in English.

"Woody, you must do what you can to open this land to the world outside. Tell the princess that I stood by her to the end."

Trying to maintain my composure I said "I will, Dzhidro."

"Good-bye, Woodrow Hammond." he said. Then he turned of his own accord and stepped into the void. A second later his body disappeared into the sea of clouds below.

Zandt turned to me.

"He was a brave, if misguided man. He died like a true sky officer of Bromfkidor. This is the resolve that is faced by your 'nations'."

"Captain Zandt," I said evenly, "apparently Dzhidro forgave you for your actions, a Christian act from a non-Christian man. I cannot do the same. Please bring me back to my cell."

I would just have to let him wonder what the word "Christian" meant.

I was devastated by the loss of Dzhidro. He had become my closest friend in the last few years and he was Ola's principal link to her own people. Telling her would be almost as hard as

watching him die was.

I was given a meal and told that we were to dock at Tippilina within the hour. I had no idea what awaited me here, but I doubted I would like it.

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Chapter Nine Center of the Republic

Because I was in the brig, I didn't see our approach to Tippiilina on this, the second occasion I had visited this mountain top city. I remember thinking to myself at the time that someday I would like to be able to explore this amazing town as a tourist, for I had only been there under the most adverse conditions up to that time.

I was removed from my cell and walked out to the top of the docking mast where I was turned over to the custody of some men in uniforms that I had

never before seen. Upon inquiring, I was told that these men were soldiers in the Bromfkidoran army.

It was no surprise that I had never encountered the foot soldiers of this land. The military establishment of this world is based in the sky, not the land. The army has been reduced under the Republic to a state police force.

One of the men who escorted me had a strangely familiar look and yet I was sure I had never met him.

I asked him his name.

"The prisoner", he said, "must remain silent."

"Please tell me." I said.

"I am sergeant Romiro Alprendauro."

I caught my breath, it had to be a coincidence. I asked, "I had a friend by that name...Alprendauro, are you..."

"My brother served as a skyman of distinction. He turned upon the world and his family."

I had to tell him. "He was executed as a traitor about two hours ago."

Sergeant Alprendauro missed a step.

"I was unaware...I thought he had...I do not understand why he returned or why he brought you!"

The other soldier spoke.

"The prisoner must remain silent!" he barked.

I remained silent while making a mental note to contact the sergeant again if I lived through this.

Upon leaving the tower we entered an automobile, the first that I had seen in Bromfkidor. The carriage was quit roomy being able to seat perhaps eight or ten people. The centermost forward seat was occupied by the driver who controlled the vehicle with a pair of levers and several foot pedals. The wheels were enormous, perhaps seven feet in diameter with twenty four thick wooden

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spokes each. I later found out that these devices were fairly recent innovations and were extremely rare at the time of my last visit. They were now catching on among the rich. The particular rich person this auto belonged to was Buerno Montolla, King of Bromfkidor.

After a high speed trip through the streets of Tippilina, the car slowed down before the House of the King, as this nations capitol was known. This huge building rivals the palace at Versailles for the opulence of its grounds. Many acres of park surround the grand structure rich in impressive topiary, spectacular fountains and well stocked with all manner of colorful avisours. The House of the King stood at one end of the Darwa Odoir, the central avenue of Tippilina, and a road led from there up to the gigantic doors of the

capital. This road was flanked by large stone statues of influential persons in Bromfkidor's history. The Entire grounds were lit by a brilliant electric lamp set on a high tower like an artificial sun, thus this part of the city had eternal daylight.

The auto turned up the palace road and stopped a few yards from the door. I was removed from the car and led inside to the chamber of the King's Table. The chamber was a small assembly hall with about fifty seats and desks for the senators and their staffs. At the front of the room was a rectangular table with twenty-five seats, one for each of the three senators from each of the seven "Stomi", the former separate nations of Bromfkidor, and a seat for the king. Along the sides of the chamber were several tiers of offices joined by stairways.

On this occasion there was but one person in the room, a nondescript gray man of middle years. I was told to stand before him.

"Do you know who I am?" He asked.

"I am not totally certain, but I think you may be the King."

His face brightened, "That's very good! Yes, I am Buerno Montolla, king of the Bromfkidoran republic. I'll wager that you wonder why you are here rather than in prison."

"I admit my curiosity. Why?"

"There is a chair for you here as a senator from the stoma of California." He pronounced the name of my native land carefully and correctly.

"Your Majesty", I began, "I am aware that it is an honor that you offer me, but California is California and Bromfkidor is..."

"...Is the world." He finished for me.

Again, the language problem... the sentence the king completed in

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his native tongue was, "Bromfkidoro tza Bromfkidorna", that is "the world is the world". This man, like all his people sees this realm as the whole world.

"Your Majesty, the world is far larger than you think. The Empire of California, while a sizable nation, is far from the largest and yet it is almost two thirds the size of your realm. Put Bromfkidor into central Asia and you would hardly notice it. The Great Principal must be abandoned if you are to have any dealings with the outside world."

"It is referred to as the Great Principal for the reason that it is in fact the central idea of our nation, it cannot be abandoned. Partner Hammond, I am YOUR king, I am everyone's king. You have a choice...you can except your place in the senate and have a voice in your nation or you can stand against the most sacred principals of humanity and be dealt with as a criminal and a traitor." He was so calm, never raising his voice.

"In spite of the fact that I am not empowered to speak for my nation", I said hotly, "I feel that I can predict with fare accuracy what those in power would say. It would be less than polite."

The king's eyes narrowed, "At this time I am conferring upon you the powers and privileges of Senator from the stoma of California. For the time being I feel it is best that I ensure that you are here for the next session of the King's Table."

It was clear as a bell, I was to be used as a political puppet by Montolla and I was to be a prisoner in his service for so long as he would need me.

I was held under guard at a luxurious house near the Palace of Guides. I had the best food and drink, I could come and go as I pleased so long as I was escorted.

The news sheets hailed my elevation in rank and editorials warmly welcomed me to the senate as the representative of the as yet unrepresented stoma of California. I was given a secretary/press liaison who would not let me use the fartalk or give interviews. Never in my life had I been so miserable.

Upon rising one "morning" and having a breakfast of fruits and a delightful human milk cheese, I was given word that the King's Table had been summoned to session. Although I tried to beg off, I knew that my efforts would in the end be futile. The only way out, it seemed, was through.

My car brought me to the House of the King within a few moments of my finishing my meal. I had barely gathered my wits

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from the peace of sleep when I was now required to "represent" the interests of California. So be it. My "press liaison", who was also my jailer, ushered me into the chamber of the King's Table".

The chamber was crowded that morning, so unlike the previous time I was there. A fat man approached me who I recognized as Mijrim Berol, a senator from the stoma of Keld. I had met him on my first journey to this land.

"Partner Hammond!" he said in an unctuous tone, "do you remember me?"

"I remember you senator Berol, you threw me out of the country and more than likely were responsible for having Dzhonith Shopari and Princess Ola Sharomna jailed."

Berol gave me a sour look. "Your command of our language has improved if not your restraint in its use. The past is the past, senator Hammond, you are here to address the needs of the future."

"Listen, Berol, you are mistaken if you think I intend to go along with this hollow charade. I will not legitimize my kidnapping by participating in this government."

I now realize that I made a grave mistake in speaking to Berol that way. It was now clear to this major politician that I was going to be, at best, useless to the government. At worst, very dangerous.

"Senator Hammond", said Berol coldly, "take your place at the table, the King is here."

I looked over my shoulder to see Montolla enter the chamber. Berol approached him and whispered in his ear. The king looked up, nodded his head and spoke to the guards. "Take Partner Hammond into custody, he is a traitor."

The next sentence I began in Bromfkidoran but somehow managed to end in English.

"I AM in custody, you despotic son of a dog! That ends now!"

As I shouted these words, I broke a chair over the table that I might use one of its legs as a weapon. No one, even soldiers or police was allowed into this chamber armed, thus the stout piece of wood I now possessed gave me a decided advantage.

As Berol and Montolla backed away from me, a soldier jumped toward me. I flattened his skull without a second thought. The street fighter that lived within me was out now and could not be restrained. Standing upon the corpse of the fallen soldier, I swung the chair leg left and right holding all at a distance. One of the senators reached for a fartalk sitting on the table.

Leaping from the back of body to the table top, I brought the

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makeshift club down upon the communication device, destroying it utterly, then jumped down and bolted for the door before anything else could happen.

Luck was on my side, for the car was still there parked in front. As quickly as I could, I seated myself in the cockpit and only then did it occur to me that I had not the slightest idea how to pilot this vehicle. Looking down to my left I saw a rope with a handle wrapped around a heavy flywheel. Having nothing to lose, I pulled hard bringing the engine to roaring life. Just then, armed police arrived at the door of the building and opened fire without hesitation. With bullets whizzing past my ears I labored at finding the proper method of putting the car into gear. After a few seconds the auto lurched forward and I went careening toward the Darwa Odoir in a surprisingly straight line given my total lack of experience. Thankfully there were few of these machines on the road so I only had to worry about terrorizing pedestrians and dray animals.

The streets of Tippilina were not designed for autos or any high speed vehicles for that matter, but the Darwa Odoir is a very broad avenue almost more like a huge public square than a Californian's idea of a city street.

Although the Darwa Odoir runs dead straight for two miles, my path included many twists and turns as I attempted avoid the hundreds people and carts which moved about the great thoroughfare. Behind me were four or five autos similar to the one I drove containing a total of some forty police officers, some of them actually hanging onto the outside or riding on the roofs of their cars.

The main avenue for much of its length passes over a massive bridge which links two of the peaks of High Darmal. This, however, is no common span for it contains buildings, towers and side streets of its own as well as the city's central park near its midpoint. Beyond the buildings which line the edge of this bridge, rise huge rocky cliffs and crags.

This peculiar urban geography led me down the path of error, for I was late in my realization that I was in fact on a bridge. The superior driving skills of the police had allowed them to gain on me and looking behind I saw one man mounted atop the lead car drawing a weapon. In a panic, I turned down a side street which I instantly saw, ended in a wooden fence. I assumed that there was a lot or a different street on the other side so I drove the auto straight through, utterly shattering the flimsy barrier.

The next moment found me flying through the air thousands of

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feet above a rocky gorge. At that time it became apparent that I had misjudged my last move. The car struck a rock face a twenty feet down tossing me from the cockpit. Instinct took over as I plummeted through space. Blindly I reached out and felt my fingers make contact with a rough rock face. My body slammed into the mountain side but somehow my grip held. I looked down to see the car still falling toward the rocks below. I counted seven seconds before I saw it explode into flames on the bottom. My situation was only slightly better than if I had stayed with the auto as I was left hanging by the finger tips of one hand from this high precipice.

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Chapter Ten
The World's Neighbor

The wind whistled through the high rocks where I hung by one hand, like the voice of a ghost soon expecting my companionship. It was only a matter of time before I tired and let go to plunge to the gory death which awaited me in the rocks below. The wind had been knocked out of me when I hit the granite cliff and as I hung there gasping it seemed that I would have to give up sooner rather than later. My body shook and spasmed as I fought to maintain my grip as well as gain purchase with my other hand. A minute passed as I felt my hand slipping, first a little, then coming loose entirely just as I felt a powerful grip on my wrist.

In all truth, the next face I expected to see was that of Jesus rather than the one I looked up to see, that of Sourdough Bob. He shouted down at me, "Mister Hammond, relax and let me pull you up! Stop struggling or I won't be able to hold on!"

I was unable to say a word and, frankly, was glad enough to merely draw breath. I let myself relax and be hauled up and over the cliff edge. Getting to

my knees I looked across the space I had hurtled through. It seemed that I had traveled fifty feet down and crossed a distance of what looked like one-hundred and fifty feet. I was becoming impatient with the constant close shaves this land offered me.

Turning back to look at Bob I asked, "Where the devil did you come from?"

"I bet you're glad to see me, 'ey?"

"That" I gasped, "would be an under statement."

"The Golden Coast is hidden beneath the span, we'll get you down there soon. The Norton is hidden in the clouds down river. We easily out maneuvered the other ship, that big mast they use for stability is nothing next to our gyros.

"Where is Mister Alprendauro, we'll send in some men to get him."

I felt cold inside remembering. "That will not be necessary, he was captured and executed as a traitor. He was made to jump from a skyship."

Sourdough Bob bowed his head and said, "He was a good and brave man. He will be sorely missed."

"Too many people have died on this 'peaceful' mission," I said,

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"perhaps we should give up and go home."

"Mister Hammond, you can't possibly mean that! For those men to have died and have our cause advanced not one iota would be a crime."

I knew that he was right. But I was at a loss as to how I should now proceed.

Sourdough Bob led me through a path in the rocks to another cliff about two-hundred feet below where a plank spanned the distance to the Golden Coast.

It was obvious that we would not be able to stay hidden long at Tippilina, so we headed down river to meet up with the Norton.

In my cabin on the Norton I felt the deep Bromfkidoran night close in on me. Despair was alien to my nature and I sought to keep it that way, but I had to admit that I was at my wits end. Mister Romolido and I had decided to continue in the direction of Strum Kemlin in the hopes of salvaging our mission.

I paced the corridors when most of the crew slept for I could not. From a distant recreation room I heard Sourdough Bob giving forth with a recitation of his doggerel epic of my last sojourn in this land.

*" Across the lands of the hidden world, to Darmal's clouded fields,
with only a gun and the shirt on his back, ever onward never yields.*

*Menace stalked where ere he stepped, ceaseless sun disturbed his dreams,
lurking beasts through shadows crept, reflective eyes agleam."*

I must admit that this poem no longer embarrassed me, but rather, I had come to think of it as something to be lived up to. I didn't have any great hopes that we could pick up the pieces of our shattered mission. Seemingly Lodrum D'Gonte had sold us out before he could even hear what we had to offer, but we had no proof that it was in fact him.

At this time we were very near the city of Konaraj in southern Pojona, very near the geographic center of the Antarctic continent. I somehow lost my balance, my surroundings spun about me. As I grabbed at a door frame to steady myself, I heard exclamations or moans from nearby cabins. Doors flung open and panicked men emerged, wild eyed and confused.

My dizziness was passing and I hurried to the bridge to find out what had happened. I arrived as discipline was restored to find Romolido, who was now acting captain, looking pale, his light gray

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skin almost bone colored.

"Good heavens, man", I cried, "what is wrong? Did we hit something?"

He gestured toward the forward window and I looked. Mere seconds before we had been as far as one could get from the frigid expanses of the Outer Waste. Now, as we emerged from a cloud, I could see the icy desert which we had somehow come to find ourselves over.

I turned back to Romolido and asked, "How did we get here? Are we a thousand miles out of our way?"

Romolido pointed to a mountain top and a thick glacier near its foot hills. "I was looking out the front windscreen as we approached Konaraj when the view wavered. The city on the mountain was gone, the Darwa river was now a glacier. A freezing wind blows where once farnouds merrily flew. My world died before my eyes."

He spoke in the language of Pojona which I didn't understand very well, but I don't think he was so much speaking to me as he was to himself. As he spoke he stared straight ahead.

"Gone in the blink of an eye..."

"Mister Romolido...Lauran, you must calm down. What you are saying is simply not possible."

"Mister Hammond", came a voice from behind me, "it is my sad duty to inform you that it is." The voice belonged to Doctor Mollot who had entered the control room on my heels. "One of the Parallel Resonant Field

Translators was accidentally thrown out of alignment. This is, in fact, a different world from the one we know."

Doctor Franklin had also come to the bridge and now made his presence known. "Mister Hammond, I believe what he says. This is the proper climate for this land that we see here. The strange conditions which formed the environment of Bromfkidor, in this world either never came to pass or collapsed millions of years earlier."

"We will have the problem fixed presently," said Mollot, "an hour, no more."

I was enraged. "Mollot," I said, "when you have fixed the problem, turn off those machines." I admit that I was terrified that we had lost our own world for good.

"We can't sir, we no longer have enough helium to hold up the ship without them."

"Not enough helium..." What the devil was I going to do about

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this? "Can we get back? Blast you Mollot, can we get back?"

"Absolutely. To the best of my knowledge the Norton is the most massive object to make the crossing...."

"This has happened before, and you still installed these devices in my ship?!?"

"Mister Hammond," said Doctor Mollot, "I know where we are and how to get back."

"Really? Where are we?"

"Xenocontinuum X-12-B Antarctic Continent 1906."

I had already passed the point of impatience. "What precisely does that mean?"

"A xenocontinuum is an entire universe which is the outcome of a particular set of historical specifics. This particular one is the second of type twelve in which the unity of Greater Colombia did not survive Bolivar, Lincoln was assassinated shortly after the conclusion of the American Civil War and California remained part of the United States. Altogether there are six levels that share these historical specifics in this group. To this we can add that this land is uninhabited on X-12-B."

"This is utterly fascinating," I said sarcastically, "but the essence of what you are saying seems to be, that although you believe that you can fix this situation, you cannot prevent it from happening again."

Mollot responded, "Can't you see that the fact that we can move an entire ship across the levels opens up whole new fields of exploration? Can't you see what an amazing triumph of human ingenuity this represents?"

I was starting to understand how blinded by obsession some men can become when held in the thrall of creativity. Mollot had become so detached from the reality of our immediate dilemma that, in his mind, its solution was secondary at best.

The loss of equilibrium struck us again, and this time I witnessed with my own eyes the extraordinary sight of the landscape rippling and changing. Below us now was the Darwa river and the city of Konaraj. I quickly ordered the extinguishing of all lights on the ship that we might pass over the city unnoticed in the darkness.

Of all the complications that had attached themselves to this journey this was the most baffling. I had no choice but to continue to utilize this uniquely dangerous technology to maintain the buoyancy of the ship and yet I could not merely return to California with nothing to show for this trip.

Within a day we had entered the stoma of Brant and would soon

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encounter the city of Strum Kemlin. It was there, of course, we would have our final chance to make good on our aims for some sort of trade with Bromfkidor.

Chapter Eleven

The Prandal Yards

Like fanciful tropical fish they filled the darkened sky, periodically semaphoring to one another and occasionally casting bright electric lights upon crews who worked on them. These were the skyships of the Prandal yards hanging amongst the clouds over an area of twenty square miles or more. From the vantage point of the "drop-pod" which was suspended several hundred feet below the Norton, Sourdough Bob and I looked over the wondrous scene while the ship hid in the clouds. We were looking over the various aircraft hoping to see if there were any active police or military vehicles.

We still had not come upon the main buildings which housed the factories and worker's dormitories until Bob sighted them off toward the horizon

The Prandal Skyship works occupied a number of low hills about ten miles to the north west of the city of Strum Kemlin.

Its cranes and hangars were consumed with the task of constructing a huge disc-shaped skyship even larger than the dreadnought type ships I had seen in the past. Even in the incomplete form that we saw here, it dwarfed the Norton the way an albatross outsizes a sparrow. Its balance mast was

integrally linked to a spidery tower that seemed to have elevators going up and down its length constantly. I calculated to myself that this ship would be able to come no closer to the earth than about seven hundred feet without risking calamity. The manufacturer must have known this well, for we saw stenciled upon its port side the name "Dori'alina II", naming it for a ship which I had with my own eyes seen fall prey to just such a calamity. It was the Dori'alina which had dogged my heels during my flight from Bromfkidor in 1903 until we had lured it* so close to the earth that it broke its balance mast and crashed.

One of the first modifications that had been made in California to the Bromfkidoran design for skyships was the replacement of that

__*Bromfkidoran skyships, unlike their counterparts in the outside world, are never personalized as "she" or "her". In fact, this culture is curiously lacking in the tendency toward anthropomorphism of any sort. Even the animals they keep for work or as pets are rarely spoken to or of in a personal fashion.

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mast with a battery of gyroscopes. This made a ship of the same capacity much lighter and more easily maneuvered.

The Norton could, if required to do so, land upon the earth while a Bromfkidoran ship of the same size never could.

We decided that we would put one of the Bromfkidorans on the ground to make personal contact with Lodrum D'Gonte. If he was found to be responsive, we would bring him aboard the Norton to show him the products that we have to trade.

I asked for volunteers from among the gray men and a young man stepped forward who, although I knew by name, I knew little of his background. His name was Wolard Bidzhiro and he told me that he had once had a job in this factory.

Mollot built him a portable wireless set which would fit in a backpack and we sent him to the surface in the drop pod placing him about a quarter mile from the main building. He knew that this is where D'Gonte kept his office.

I went to the surface with young Wolard to wait in the pod for his return with Lodrum D'Gonte. The pod was landed among some low bushes and the cable leading back to the Norton could not be easily seen in the darkness. I bid Mister Bidzhiro Godspeed and he was on his way leaving me alone but for my telephone link to the Norton. I was armed with a pistol but dearly hoped that I would not need it.

The night sounds of central Bromfkidor surrounded me. There were, of course, crickets as well as various calls and cries yet alien to my ears. The

small flying avisaur known as the "ostoudna" or in English "nightwing", filled the landscape with its soft, haunting lament. In the distance a small herd of grazing animals made a distant lowing. For some reason all this sound made the night seem that much lonelier.

The full impact of how alone and homesick I was hit me full force in that solitary night. How I found myself pining for the company of the incomparable Ola Sharomna, my beloved wife! How I missed the playful gamboling and unanswerable questions of my little son!

Tempting as it was to dwell on my personal problems, I had to focus on the here and now. Just as I pulled myself from my wool-gathering mood, Wolard reappeared dressed in Bromfkidoran fashion.

"Where did you get those clothes?", I asked.

"A friend who still works here owed me a gambling debt. I

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thought they would make me less conspicuous."

I thought him a very smart to discard his Californian style suit. I imagined the stares I might draw if I were to appear on the streets of San Francisco dressed in the manner of a Hindu.

Mister Bidzhiro continued. "Partner D'Gonte is aboard the new ship inspecting the work's progress. No one here seems to know anything of his having had contact with us."

I responded, "Do you suppose that he told only the authorities and no one else?"

"From what I know of him, it seems unlikely. He likes to make a great show of whatever he feels is a noble impulse. Being a powerful business man, he has frequently found himself at odds with the government and many within the Prandal works find themselves at odds with him."

To me this sounded much like the situation to be encountered in many large business concerns in my own experience. Thankfully not in my own, yet. Who knew what I might be facing upon my return regarding this extended "shake-down" flight of the Norton.

"Do you know Lodrum D'Gonte's face well?"

"I worked for the man for quite some time."

I telephoned to the Norton to have us drawn back up.

Wolard Bidzhiro assured me that D'Gonte would be on board the Dori'alina II for several hours. It was now my intention to send the drop pod to that ship and invite him aboard the Norton.

The maneuver would be complicated, requiring perfect timing. The Norton would have to emerge from its veil of clouds but would be able to

maintain some modicum of camouflage by killing all lighting onboard the ship. By doing this we would only be detectable by the stars we occluded.

This was done with the pod at full extension to the altitude of the target ship. Some of the Bromfkidoran skymen of our crew devised this technique based on the method for boarding used by the pirates who sometimes plague the skies of this land. The only difference was that the pirates would simply hang onto a tether and swing down upon their victims without the benefit of an enclosing pod. The truth is that I felt foolhardy enough doing it this way.

We swooped toward the gigantic ship with a speed which was nigh incalculable. It swelled before us at a frightful rate and even trusting the bridge crew of the Norton as I did, I still found myself bracing for impact with half completed monster of the sky.

To my eternal gratitude, the confidence I had for my crew was well founded and we slowed neatly to a stop within six feet of an

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open point on the ship's airframe. Opening the pod, we threw over a grapple and hauled ourselves into direct contact with the hull. In spite of the fact that I could be easily spotted, I felt that I must share the risk of this mission with young Mister Bidzhiro and thus we set out into the leviathan vessel together.

Most of the ship was, as yet, unlit and the corridors occupied only by people who were so intent upon their work that I was for a time able to walk through unnoticed. As we moved into more finished areas I would lurk in the shadows when anyone approached. Wolard asked a passing workman if he had seen D'Gonte and was directed to the level just above where he could be found inspecting one of the engine rooms.

Up a nearby spiral ramp we ran where my young companion put his hand on my chest and said, "I hear his voice." He pointed toward an open doorway and we quietly approached it.

Peering inside, we saw a portly man surrounded by several engineers with his head inside of the huge engine's boiler.

"Partner D'Gonte," I called, "my name is Woodrow Hammond, we spoke by fartalk some time ago."

D'Gonte's head struck the inside of the boiler with a resounding clang. Standing up and rubbing his bruised and balding pate he turned to greet me. "Was it really necessary to sneak up on me this way, Partner Hammond?"

Lodrum D'Gonte was an unusual looking man. The Bromfkidoran fashion was for men to wear their hair about shoulder length, but D'Gonte wore his at least twice that long perhaps to make up for its total absence in front. His hazel eyes were framed by small square spectacles which were perched on a nose that was rather short and broad for that of a gray man. His face was dominated by a ludicrously large handlebar mustache.

"Please forgive me, circumstances have forced me to unusual extremities."

The engineers were muttering between one another and I overheard the name of the "Black Pirate" a few times.

D'Gonte silenced them and said, "Now that you are here, what can I do for you. You said something about advances in the art of skyshipping."

Having now seen and spoken to this man, I no longer believed that he was responsible for exposing our mission.

"I would like to invite you aboard my ship so I can show you."

He looked slightly wary. "Can I be accompanied by my

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engineering staff?"

"Not this time. We must protect our technical secrets until an agreement has been reached. I'm sure you will understand."

Lodrum D'Gonte looked me straight in the eye, taking my measure before saying, "Quite so. When?"

"Now, if you are able."

"Lead on Partner Hammond."

The drop-pod fell away from the ship's side and started to move upward. Above our heads was a black absence of stars which marked the location of the Norton. As we sped skyward the blackness dominated our field of vision. D'Gonte was visibly nervous so I told him that we truly meant him no harm.

"That causes me no worry, Partner Hammond," he said, "it is my fear of heights in this tiny pod. It will subside once we are aboard a larger ship."

I could not help but laugh. "Forgive me, I mean no disrespect, Partner D'Gonte, I was just surprised."

"I know that it must seem amusing that a man like me would ever have found his way into this business. It is the very cutting edge of engineering and I am an engineer. Rest assured that my anxiety has contributed toward making Prandal ships the very safest in the skies. I have also become a very rich man... a house here and on the shore of Lake Godan as well as one in Tippiлина. Can't we get there any faster? For Harro's sake, you should have let me design this thing!"

His nervousness was causing him to babble.

Finally we entered the lower hold of the ship and the doors closed beneath us. The lights came on and I heard the engines switch from station keeping to propulsion to hide us once more among the clouds.

"Welcome aboard Partner D'Gonte, this is the ISS Norton, flagship of the Californian Sky Navy."

D'Gonte was shaking and sweating. "I am truly happy to be here. Truly happy." he said.

Chapter Eleven

Office Politics

First, I took Lodrum D'Gonte to my office where I could show him a layout map of the ship and talk with him.

I wanted to familiarize him with the trouble we had gone through to reach him. I told him of my arrest and the execution of Dzhidro Alprendauro. He absolutely denied that he had spoken to the government about our call although he had mentioned it at a board meeting. At that time he had ordered all present to remain silent on the subject. Evidently someone had disobeyed.

"There is an under director, Viero Czadras, who I know wants my position. It would not do much for him if I made too much money for the company, further I forbade my eldest daughter from marrying him."

"Where is Partner Czadras now?"

"He went to Tippilina about half a month ago and never returned."

It sounded to me like this Czadras was the culprit.

"Are you sure that the consequences of dealing with me are going to be worth it?" I asked.

"Woodrow Hammond of Kala Forna, I, and many other Bromfkidorans have come to believe that the consequences of not dealing with you and others in the outer world will be much more grave. I would very much like to see what you have done with skyship technology".

I took him on a tour of the Norton showing him the Gyroscopes and the PRFT equipment although I did not dwell on its trans-dimensional properties. His mind was very astute and by asking questions, he managed to delve that these devices would allow a ship to traverse a space without

being able to be detected at all. One could switch over to a xenocontinuum and be seen to simply disappear, traverse any amount of space required and then reappear at one's destination.

"Imagine hiding entire aerial armadas as they approached their targets. Imagine being able to appear and capture the opposing leader or place bombs wherever or whenever one liked!"

"In war," he said, "this device could be decisive, but please do not make it available to me or any of my countrymen at this time. They

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will use it against you, Partner Hammond. You must deal with the Republic of Bromfkidor from a position of superior strength. Buerno Montolla and any of his followers who think of the outer world as anything more than a crazy story, see it only as provinces in rebellion which must be brought back to the fold."

"The Great Principal." I said.

"The Great Principal." he answered. "It may be difficult for you to understand what the world was like before the great Dzhidro Bogadnij united us and saved us from warfare which was well on its way to destroying civilization. At that time none of us had any notion that there was a larger world beyond the Outer Waste, many still have no idea. My brother is the junior senator from Brant and he believes that Montolla was elected by the thinnest of margins. He needs a great cause to empower his government."

I had to ask, "What cause?"

"This huge ship that I'm building...it's going to carry troops into the land beyond Palmeroj. Pata Gona"

"Patagonia? You do not endorse this but you still are willing to sell this ship to the government?"

"I just try to keep the work slow and hope that Montolla will die or have a change of heart. We are already at war so far as the King's Table is concerned, were I to refuse any government orders, it would be seen as treason."

As we walked throughout the ship, we discussed what we might do to make coexistence an option. This was not me practicing diplomacy on my own, but merely two captains of industry of their respective lands talking politics. It is possible that almost as much might be accomplished this way.

I told him my whole history in this land and how I had married the princess Ola Sharomna. I told him of my half-Bromfkidoran son who was the joy of my life.

He told me of how he had become the first of a family of fish sellers (the name D'Gonte even means "fish seller"), to get an advanced education. He told me of his wife and three daughters who he loves to spoil. He told me of

the feeling he got whenever he saw a new skyship leave the yards. That feeling I knew well.

The one terrible truth that I learned from this conversation was that I had already told him too much of our technology, he had told me too much of Bromfkidor's war plans.

I could not allow him to return home. I had to explain this to him.

"Lodrum," I said, "as long as you are in charge of the Prandal

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works, you are bound to serve the king."

"That is true, Woodrow."

"I am thinking that I cannot let you return to Strum Kemlin."

"Now see here..."

"Partner D'Gonte, were our positions reversed, I know that you would feel the same way. You are an engineer who has comprehended all you have seen here. You have admitted that you know of your government's intention to invade the outer world. I suspect that, in spite of the fact that you disagree with your nation's policies, you could not resist building a gyroscope of your own. Although you are not familiar with the principals which operate the PRFT, the mere knowledge that it is possible could result in its being brought into being in Bromfkidor. I am truly sorry, but when you made me aware of Montolla's intentions, your kidnapping became inevitable. "I had been pacing up and down the room as I delivered this explanation and thus had my back turned when he gave his reply.

"Partner Hammond, I also know that in my place you would do the same thing."

I turned to find him pointing a pistol at my heart.

In retrospect I can see that even making contact with this man had been a grave error. The shame of it is that I came to this realization just a few moments too late.

He marched me down to the lower deck and showing the crew his weapon, had them lower both of us in the drop-pod to the surface.

Knowing how nervous he was in the pod, I did my best to make no move at all lest he kill me by accident. Even so, he sweated and twitched so much that I thought I might die in spite of my cooperation.

We reached the earth and he got out of the pod. Still pointing the gun at me, D'Gonte said, "I will go back to my business. I will betray none of your nation's secrets, but I cannot give up my life! If you try to follow, I will have to kill you."

The worst hack novelist could not have scripted the next few seconds without blushing.

From behind a bush, I heard someone call, "Woodrow!"

D'Gonte whipped around and fired four poorly aimed shots in a row. He who called stood up and fired one, killing D'Gonte instantly with a neat hole through his temple. To my absolute shock that marksman was none other than Dzhidro Alprendauro.

"Dzhidro! You're not dead!"

"By the words of Harro, Woodrow, you can still tell the quick

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from the dead! Are you all right my friend?"

"I don't think he truly intended to harm me, but you have inadvertently solved a difficult problem." I pointed to the corpse. "That is Lodrum D'Gonte and I'm afraid that I allowed him to learn too much."

"You must explain this to me in detail." Said Dzhidro.

Thus my friend who I had clearly see die, and myself were reunited.

Chapter Thirteen Dzhidro's Tale

To have hoped to see Dzhidro Alprendauro again would have been correctly judged as madness. I had, with my own eyes, see this man step out into the sky to seemingly plummet to an inevitable doom. And yet, here he stood.

I motioned him quickly into the pod before the sounds of the shots drew the curious. Within a few minutes we were back aboard the Norton. I called to the bridge to set a course to the west for the open country of the Brant/Ranse frontier.

With work aside, I was finally able to ask Dzhidro for his account of the events which led him here. This is the tale he related.

"When I was in the sky navy, the job I held was called "landing Lieutenant" which entailed leading a company of men from the ship to the ground on tethers. It is a little known skill originated by the air pirates who plagued the skies in the times of crumbling civilization that preceded the Formation War. Our first encounter, you will remember, was with me at the end of a tether greeting your party in the Outer Waste.

"It was the skills I thus learned which served me so well on that day aboard the Bontor Do'alina. The balance mast actually was mostly hidden in the clouds below and I was able to grab a guy line and swing over to it just as I passed into the mist. I have practiced a great deal of linesmanship in my time, but this was without a doubt the most demanding task to which I had yet applied those skills. I am sure that it was the magnitude of the reward for a perfect performance, that is to say my own continued existence, which drove me to such excellence. As it was, I was required to hang on in the freezing wind for several minutes which seemed like hours while I caught my breath until I was able to rappel down the length of the balance mast, a task that I was forced to perform bare-handed to the detriment of the flesh of my palms.

"At the very end of the mast on the larger ships is a small

workroom full of pulleys for adjusting the tension of the guylines. With great difficulty, I made my way to it and spent the rest of the trip to Tippiilina there. When we arrived I mingled with the ground maintenance crew and made contact with some friends that I have in the city.

"I heard that you had been taken to the House of the King and that you had made an escape attempt. That was the last anyone I

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was in contact with ever heard of you. There was a rumor that you had fallen to your death from Odoir Bridge, I am well pleased to see that that was not true."

"I was almost true, Dzhidro, had it not been for Sourdough Bob... well, I'm just glad he was there."

Dzhidro continued. "I made it my first duty after that to reestablish contact with the Norton. So far as I knew, the ship I commanded was in desperate trouble."

"Mister Romolido has served very well in your absence, you must be sure to thank him."

"Not *too* well, I hope, but he does have my thanks.

"I found Halord Bishindi before his people had left the city for Zonn and purchased a cart and team from them. I set out for Strum Kemlin in a Kozar's wagon.

"I didn't get far before I spotted a patrol of the Sky Navy down in a field. They had a line down at the far edge of the meadow which reached up into the clouds. Quietly I released the dray animals from their harness and stepped down from the wagon. I made my way to the line and gave a signal tug, a coded sequence of short tugs which tell the line crew to pull up. As I was hauled up to the ship I heard shouts from the ground. There was some unpleasantness when I arrived at the flight deck. It was assumed that I was a vagrant who was playing games. I'm afraid that one of them had to be thrown overboard to convince them otherwise. There were six in the crew who were still on board. I managed to get them all to take lines to the surface at gun point. They would be able to use my abandoned wagon as transport if they could round up the animals."

I was amazed. "You single-handedly hijacked a military ship?"

"Luckily for me," he said, "its not as difficult as it sounds. Ship crews are well trained against piracy in the air but are totally unprepared for a single well trained infiltrator from the ground.

"I appropriated a uniform and brought the ship to the Prandal yards under the presumption that I had been assigned to bring it in for maintenance. Upon arriving and checking in with the yard foreman under a assumed name, I got rid of the uniform and checked into the small hotel near the yard.

I resolved that if I didn't hear from you in a few days, I would contact the director myself. I admit that I had little hope that you would actually appear. I was on my way to inquire about the director when I spotted the Norton's drop-pod descending in the distance."

I was an almost unbelievable coincidence that likely saved my life.

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I proceeded to inform Dzhidro of all that had happened during our separation with a special emphasis on the continuum disrupting malfunction of the PRFT. I asked Dzhidro if he could still get his hands on the patrol ship. We would find it invaluable for surveillance purposes. Also, it would be equipped with enough arms to substantially damage the giant dreadnought which was aimed so menacingly at our civilization.

Again I prepared for the swing down maneuver in the drop-pod.

The plan was for Dzhidro and myself to simply board the patrol ship and pilot it back to the vacant parasite hold on board the Norton which once housed the ill-fated "San Francisco".

Having done this before, I was now relatively comfortable with this method of reaching other vehicles in the air and anticipated no difficulty. The one thing about this that I could never get used to was that the pod was entirely under control from the outside, my only input being a telephone link to the bridge of the Norton.

We boarded the drop-pod and the lower bay doors opened beneath us.

Most of the drop-pod was made of tempered glass panels with only the extreme upper and extreme lower panels being opaque wood and metal. Inside were four closely spaced bucket seats. This is what gives the drop-pod its unique characteristic of making the passenger feel both closed in and overexposed at the same time. Given his natural fears, it was no wonder that D'Gonte reacted as he had.

We were swung out into the night as all the lights on the ship went out leaving us seemingly alone in the sky. Dzhidro pointed directly ahead where we saw the patrol ship growing larger in our vision. With bullet-like speed we swung toward our target having only faith as our assurance that we would be halted in time.

From behind the patrol ship rose another military ship slightly larger than the patrol ship. I would compare it to a naval corvette in size and armament. We did not at first know if it had noticed us but they willingly confirmed that they had by firing a shot over our head. I called up to the Norton to pull up and away as more shots were fired at the Norton herself.

Just as the Norton started to pull up a shot severed the cable which joined the drop-pod with her and abruptly cutting off telephone communications. The pod was equipped with a gyroscope thus we did not tumble but we were

now falling freely and seemingly within but a few short seconds of meeting our doom. Still rocketing toward the patrol ship, we could do naught but

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brace ourselves against impact. We hit the ship's side like

an artillery shell, passing through a gas cell and imbedding in a supporting bulkhead on the opposite side. Upon impact all the glass in the pod shattered deafeningly and we were thrown free to land bruised, bleeding but alive in the bottom of the now deflating gas cell.

We had to cut our way out which resulted in us being roughly deposited into the corridor below. More bruises were the inevitable result. There seemed to be no one aboard at the moment so we made our way as quickly as possible to the cockpit.

The deflated gas cell was causing the ship to slowly list to one side. As we arrived at the controls of the ship, we saw the corvette rising above our heads in pursuit of the Norton. Without so much as a word, Dzhidro grabbed the controls and wheeled the now crippled aircraft around to give chase as well as it could to the Norton's assailant. The craft was now almost on its side in the air and had it not been being driven at full power, would be sinking rapidly toward the earth.

"Even giving all this speed", said Dzhidro, "we have only a very few minutes before this ship is no longer sky worthy in any way!"

We had to stop the corvette and reach the Norton within seconds or plunge helplessly to the ground. I ran down the short corridor from the cockpit, which was difficult as I had to do it on the wall. Looking to the right and to the left, I spotted a gunner's position and made for it as quickly as I could.

Getting into position was awkward but after a few seconds I was seated and strapped in. The weapon was rather like a large machine gun and it kicked like four mules when I depressed the trigger. The recoil set the now unstable ship spinning. A lucky shot struck a stabilizer and drove the corvette into an uncontrolled yaw which brought its forward guns out of position to do any further damage to the Norton for the moment. I fired a concentrated burst at one point on the hull hoping to ignite the hydrogen inside, but the surprise of our attack had worn off and the ship now was taking deadly aim against us.

As the Bromfkidoran corvette turned toward us, the Norton was descending with the severed cable from the drop-pod dangling freely, whipping about like a tortured eel in the wind. The driving propeller of the hostile craft met up with the loose cable with deadly inevitability. The

rapidly whirling propeller cut the cable into short sections,
once...twice...three times it suddenly caught

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about the hub of the motor. Like a top on a string the small ship was hauled with remarkable speed against the belly of the Californian ship. The corvette broke into three ragged pieces, two of which drifted toward the land below, the third dangling and jerking at the end of the cable shedding bodies and burning debris.

While I took in this sight it grew smaller in my vision as we now started to drop away, gravity requiring its unavoidable price. Our ship started to tumble, now out of any semblance of control. I made my way back to the cockpit where Dzhidro Alprendauro sat as the view spun about us, showing first a scene of the ever shrinking Norton, then of the ever growing earth. It seemed that now, finally nature's ultimate debt upon all beings would have to be paid. Sky...earth...sky...earth, I closed my eyes against the onrushing advent of oblivion.

Chapter Fourteen

Loose Ends

I felt a surprisingly light bump. It was my supposition that the actual last instant was blanked from my experience by the grace of God. I would open my eyes and the Lord would be there to comfort my, now transfigured, soul.

The Lord resembled Dzhidro Alprendauro with a bloody nose in the extreme.

The ship was upside down with Dzhidro and I crammed into the upper dome along with anything else that didn't happen to be strapped down when we landed.

My inner ear still detected motion. Upward motion. We had fallen and yet we rose. My disorientation still ruled my perceptions so I was unable at the time to make head nor tail of my current situation.

Wrapping my jacket around my hand, I punched through a window of the dome and squeezed my way out onto a surface of wood planks which had been broken and splintered where the small skyship had touched down. Two men were running toward me who I recognized. One was Luran Romolido and the other was the engineer Robert Green, the only other man of my own race in all of Bromfkidor. We had crashed on the upper deck of the Golden Coast which had cast off from the Norton the moment we had gotten into trouble and placed themselves between us and the ground.

The men helped me remove the unconscious Mister Alprendauro from the wreck. As he regained his wits he looks at me through eyes which had become bloodshot from the impact. "Can I assume", he croaked, "that I actually survived?"

"So it would seem," I said, "but I would avoid trying that again."

He rolled his eyes. "Not today, I think." Upon speaking those words, he again lapsed into unconsciousness.

By this time others had come up to the deck to repair the damage and get us inside.

We had the whole time been heading back to the Norton and we could see that other ships were taking up the chase. We had to get underway now.

Dzhidro was placed in the infirmary aboard the Norton and I ran to the bridge as quickly as I could. There were now three ships in pursuit of us but none of them were capable of matching our speed

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and thus drifted farther and farther into the distance.

I was thoroughly battered and needed sleep, but before I went to bed, I ordered that the patrol ship should be repaired.

When I awoke, we were heading for the Outer Waste beyond the Ranse' frontier. I headed down to the lower deck where the patrol ship had been moved to check on its repairs. I now viewed the destruction of the Dori'alina II as crucial to buy time for the outside world in its conflict with Bromfkidor. The small patrol ship would be the only thing we could get close enough with now that the Norton had been seen.

Doctor Mollot came up with the plan that we would use to get rid of the giant war ship. One of the PRFTs would be placed aboard and would shift the entire thing over to xenocontinuum X-12-B where the eternal ice and snow of that world's Antarctica would bury it beyond the sight of man for all time.

Within forty-eight hours, Dzhidro was up and around and ready to take command of the Norton. The patrol ship was repaired and had been modified to carry almost all the weapons we could fit aboard as well as the PRFT. I would command and among my crew would be Mister Romolido, the engineer Mister Green and Young Mister Bidzhiro as well as five of the of experienced Bromfkidorans and Doctor Mollot.

The ship had been fitted with one of the motors from the Golden Coast along with a pair of oversize fuel tanks and used the PRFT to counter the extra weight. The result was a craft which was monstrously overpowered and overarmed and yet small and inconspicuous.

Over the next few days we moved to the mountains where the stoma of Brant melts into the Outer Waste. From there we would launch our mission. I would have to cross a little less than two-hundred and fifty miles back to the Prandal yards, a journey of about two hours with the new motor.

With all the modifications the ship was quite crowded with a crew of ten men, less than half the number it was designed to accommodate.

We set out at the highest possible speed with all crewmen firmly strapped in. Everywhere one would look there was a piece of equipment or weaponry. There had never been any ship, Californian or Bromfkidoran, so heavy and yet still air worthy.

It amazed me how quickly the Prandal yards came into view. Many of the ships that had been there before were now gone as if

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they had expected our attack. This suspicion was confirmed when we saw several of the ships that were supposedly at maintenance dock turned to meet us.

There is a cruel side, I suppose, of my nature that made me wish I could see the faces of the pilots of those ships when they saw the firepower that was to be unleashed upon them

The Dori'alina II was about five hundred yards ahead of us when the first two ships came toward us guns blazing and met with quick misfortune when we sped in-between them faster than they expected causing them to riddle one another with holes.

Two other ships were in hot pursuit as we neared the giant skyship. We took the patrol ship right in through an opening in the incomplete hull. One crashed in flames against the side, the other made it through behind us.

We stopped almost as soon as we had penetrated the hull, landing on a, as yet skeletal inner deck. The pursuing ship slid against a pillar and broke open.

As quickly as we could, the crew unloaded the PRFT apparatus and attached it securely to the framework of the great ship.

The crew of the attacking ship was making its way through the web work of beams and cables that made up the ship when the PRFT was activated. The disorientation of the transition caused most of them to fall back to the bottom of the hull.

It was instantly apparent that the transfer was successful by the unbroken expanse of white seen through the open sections of the hull. Disconnecting the machinery and loading it back aboard took only a few seconds while the crew of the other ship looked around in bewilderment.

We blasted free of the now stranded ship into the eternal winter that was this land on X-12-B. As we sped away it drifted to the surface of the snow and ice, its hydrogen rapidly cooling and thus providing less lift. When the balance mast struck earth the entire craft balanced upon it for a long moment before teetering over to break into several pieces on the barren landscape.

We had agreed that we would not transfer back until we were at the point where the Norton rested. The excess of heat from the huge motor would provide enough warmth for our crew until that time. A gale force wind tore into our ship as soon as we got under way and we then knew that the trip back would be somewhat longer than the trip out.

The small ship coursed through the raging sky like a swallow through a hurricane. Thunder spoke from the clouds like invective

from a mad god. The savage gale tried again and again to toss the compact vessel of the sky to the ground, crumpled like a piece of paper. Lightning

continuously lashed the air around us, narrowly missing us and making the atmosphere crackle and glow. This was the Antarctic winter, these were the elements at their most unruly. The crew did their best to fight the random cross winds which tortured the small ship, but still we were rocked to and fro like a cork on the ocean. I'm afraid that we all became ill on the trip back to the Norton's position. We made the transition at the edge of the mountains to find the Norton exactly where it should be. At this time it occurred to me that this was the first time in my experience on this continent that anything had gone precisely according to plan. Unfortunately we were on the wrong side of the continent for a quick return to the Americas. I decided that it would be safer for us to travel around Bromfkidor through the frozen desert of the Outer Waste.

It took us sixteen days to reach the Palmer peninsula, and from there we finally returned to our own world.

The End of San Francisco

As we made our passage through South America, the crew set about making repairs and relaxation in the off hours which were plentiful. There were no crises of any description along the way which was more than fine with all concerned.

We would make port at Bolivar and then from there head directly for San Francisco. Colombia was possibly the world's most beautiful nation in those days, perhaps even more beautiful than California. The landscape was almost as varied as that of the U.S.A. from the Andes mountains in the west to the jungles on the Caribbean coast. Bolivar was in the northernmost state of Venezuela to the south of the metropolis of Caracas on the Orinoco river. Here was the place that Bolivar, the American Napoleon, built his capital for the nation of Greater Colombia and where his descendants rule as presidents-for-life to this day. The current president, Juan Edgar Bolivar y Van Der Kassel, was at war with Chile, supposedly over fishing rights, tariffs and extradition of criminals, but more likely over future dominance in the South Pacific.

Luckily, the country's beauty and friendly people outshined its political childishness. We took our ease in Bolivar and paid and discharged the South American crewmen (those who were not Chilean) here. I had given orders that no one would discuss the political situation of Bromfkidor here. I wanted to inform Californian officials first of the peril faced by the outside world.

The final leg of our journey would take us to my beloved home of San Francisco. The chronometer which had kept time for us in timeless Bromfkidor showed that we had been away for a week short of two months. I'm still not sure whether it felt like it had been more or less time.

Coming up the golden coast of California, I felt like a great weight had lifted from my soul. I had missed every single thing about my native land. I wanted to see and hold my wife and son. I wanted to get back to my business and use some of the ideas which we would get from taking apart the Bromfkidoran skyship we had brought back with us. I wanted to walk the city streets. I wanted to see a ball game. I wanted to be a man among my own people once more. These little dreams were momentarily thwarted by an errant

spark.

San Francisco itself had just appeared in the distance and wireless communication had just been established, I understand, when a short circuit

took place in the PRFT which maintained our buoyancy. The sudden shift to X-12-B caught the entire crew by total surprise. Most of the crew became violently ill and the control of the ship was left to itself resulting in the Norton slowly coming to a stop in the sky then drifting with the wind. Slowly I raised my head as my senses came back to normality only to be confronted with a vision of utmost horror.

A giant had stepped on the city of San Francisco. Almost every building in town was broken, flattened or tilted off its foundations. The streets themselves were torn asunder here and there. Wireless communication was being attempted but the frequencies we used were empty. This was no surprise as the skyship yard did not exist in this California. We finally got through to an amateur wireless enthusiast who informed us that a great earthquake had struck the city six weeks before. Only now were things just starting to be rebuilt.

Mollot insisted that we try to find out more about this strange xenocontinuum. We knew that there was no Bromfkidor and that California was still part of the U.S.A.. There had been a war with Spain. There was no state of Napoleana and the city of Mulweeno was known as Bogalusa on the Pearl, not the Matahatchie, river, and was comparatively unimportant. Norton I, was remembered only as a harmless lunatic.

Our correspondent over the telegraph was bemused by the nature of our questions but gamely answered all. I was concerned that we would soon be spotted and arouse curiosity which might prove unhealthy. Just as my concerns were leading me to order breaking off communication, there was a shout from the helm.

Something small was heading in our direction. I thought at first that it might be some kind of bird, but a second look found me feeling the same sense of encounter with the alien that I had when we came upon the flock of daurodna in northern Bromfkidor. It was just a frame with a motor and a propeller and kite-like wings. One man sat amongst cables and levers controlling the strangely graceless aircraft. I realized that this craft was heavier than air, totally dependent on those flimsy wings and maintaining its speed to keep it in the air. The man at the controls must be daring to the point of near insanity to operate such a contraption. It circled us twice and we waved to the pilot as he

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passed the bridge. He merely regarded us with a bewildered stare.

The aircraft was obviously very primitive, perhaps air worthy technically, but unable to stay long in the air without mishap.

Predictably enough, the powered kite started to show signs of instability, the pilot signs of panic. I had the Norton moved below the little craft just in

time for it to make a very clumsy landing on the upper deck. Tragically for the pilot of that tiny device, that was the exact moment that the PRFT brought us back to our own continuum.

Upon our recovery a group of men found the pilot on the upper deck futilely attempting to restart his motor. Mister Bidzhiro was the first man to reach him.

"What the hell are you?" the man was looking like he might be in shock.

Mister Bidzhiro replied, "I am a Bromfkidoran."

The man giggled like one losing his mind. "You're a brontosaurus... I suppose that I'm not surprised.... no sir, not surprised a bit."

I came up beside him and said. "Sir, perhaps you had better come below decks where we can talk."

His name was Wendell Wiley, an engineering student from Massachusetts and owner of one of the very few "aeroplanes" in San Francisco. He had come to help out after the quake and brought the flying machine for recreation. He had never seen anything like our ship and flew up to investigate. He was now stuck in our world until such a time as we could shift him back. *If* we could, that is.

The San Francisco that was below us had also suffered an earthquake but was much farther along the road to recovery. Norton palace seemed to have suffered no damage and Nob Hill and Sunset Heights little. Work crews were everywhere and it was easy to see that the city would be back to normal in a short time.

We signaled the shipyard at which time I received a message from my dear Ola. All was well at home. The sad part was that all was not well in the world.

Wendell Wiley became a guest in my house where he was quite comfortable. Dzhydro picked up California Skyship and I had to contact the War Department.

They were, of course, infuriated with me for "borrowing" the Norton and losing the San Francisco. They were, however very interested in learning that Buerno Montolla planned to invade the outer world starting with Patagonia. They now knew that our nation and perhaps all nations would now have to be prepared for

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the very worst.

Thus California set about building a sky navy which would be able to stand against that of the so called "People of the Sky". This time the other governments listened to us when we presented the facts and showed them the Bromfkidoran ship. The U.S.A. joined with us in alliance as did

Argentina, Colombia, Great Britain, France and Germany. It turned out that we were given time to build up our defense.

Sometimes I find myself caught up in the might-have-beens, all the ways that things could have gone but for one tiny circumstance. At that time I was terribly worried that the circumstance which had led the world to this juncture was myself.

The attack came eight years later.

*Here ends the narrative of
Woodrow Hammond*

Although we corresponded and spoke by telephone up to a month before his death, I never actually saw Woodrow Hammond again after January of 1977. To this day I remain in touch with his third wife and widow, Rebecah Mott Hammond who, I am sure, will live well into the twenty-first century for she is only one year older than myself. Ola Sharomna died a quarter century before her birth, in fact a year before the birth of her mother. I know that it seems odd to dwell on this but I use it as an illustration of both the longevity and the vitality of Woodrow Hammond.

It was a rare privilege to know such a rare man.

In the last phone conversation we had, he told me an odd little story regarding another phone conversation he had once had.

It seems that when he had been back for about a week from his second sojourn in Bromfkidor, he received a phone call from a ninety-seven year old ex-president of the U.S.A., Abraham Lincoln. In his last years he had become concerned that the cause of unity could now come to be viewed in a negative light. In his senile but well meaning imagination, he had somehow come to see a connection between himself as president and the king of Bromfkidor, preaching union over all.

Hammond had no idea what to say to the man to help calm his obscure anxiety except "I'm sure your wrong, Mister President."

Lincoln died that night after having made phone calls to over fifty people from Samuel Clemens to Thomas Edison to a pharmacist in Atlanta who had sent him a hate letter per week since 1864.

Hammond said that it had comforted him to find out that a man such as Lincoln had harbored doubts of this kind to the bitter end. Later in his life Woodrow Hammond would become an acquaintance of Richard Nixon who became the only Prime Minister of California to ever be expelled from office for misconduct by Imperial order. Hammond observed that Nixon never had any doubts, which also comforted him.

"History", he said, "seems to favor the man who questions his actions even after he has taken them."

History favored Woodrow Hammond whether or not his reasons for thinking so were correct.

